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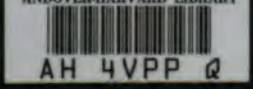
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HULSEAN LECTURES

FOR THE YEAR 1840.

BY THE

REV. THEYRE T. SMITH, M.A.

LONDON:
RICHARD CLAY, PRINTER, BREAD STREET HILL.

HULSEAN LECTURES

FOR THE YEAR 1840.

THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION

IN CONNEXION WITH

THE PRINCIPLES OF MORALITY.

BY THE

REV. THEYRE T. SMITH, M.A.

OF QUEEN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE,

AND ASSISTANT-PREACHER AT THE TEMPLE CHURCH.

LONDON:

B. FELLOWES, LUDGATE STREET;

J. & J. J. DEIGHTON, CAMBRIDGE.

1841.

TO

JOHN GRAHAM, D.D.

MASTER OF CHRIST'S COLLEGE, VICE-CHANCELLOR,

TO

CHRISTOPHER WORDSWORTH, D.D.

MASTER OF TRINITY COLLEGE,

AND TO

RALPH TATHAM, D.D.

MASTER OF ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE,

TRUSTEES OF THE LECTURE FOUNDED BY

THE REV. JOHN HULSE,

THE FOLLOWING DISCOURSES,

PREACHED BY THEIR APPOINTMENT,

ARE MOST RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,

BY

THE AUTHOR.

SUBSTANCE OF CERTAIN CLAUSES RELATING TO THE HULSEAN LECTURESHIP,

In the Will of the Rev. J. Hulse, M. A., the Founder of that and other offices in the University of Cambridge.

[Dated July 21, 1777.]

He founds a Lectureship in the University of Cambridge.

The Lecturer is to be a "Clergyman in the University of Cambridge, of the degree of Master of Arts, and under the age of forty years." He is to be *elected annually* "on Christmas-day, or within seven days after, by the Vice-Chancellor for the time being, and by the Master of Trinity College, and the Master of St. John's College, or any two of them." In case the Master of Trinity, or the Master of St. John's, be the Vice-Chancellor, the Greek Professor is to be the third Trustee.

The duty of the said Lecturer, as stated in the Will, is "to preach" so many as "*twenty* sermons in the whole year," as well as to print them in the same period; and it having been found, in consequence, that few were willing to undertake the office, application was made to the Court of Chancery, with a view the better to carry into effect the intention of its Founder. The result was, that by an order of that Court (dated 21st December, 1830), the number of the Sermons was reduced to eight, and the time allowed for printing them extended to the term of one year from the delivery of the last of them.

The subject of the Lectures is to be, "the Evidence for Revealed Religion; the Truth and Excellence of Christianity; Prophecies and Miracles; direct or collateral Proofs of the

Christian Religion, especially the collateral arguments; the more difficult texts or obscure parts of the Holy Scriptures;" or any one or more of these topics, at the discretion of the Preacher. The subject of the Lectures is *not* to be "any particular sects or controversies amongst Christians themselves; except some new and dangerous error, either of superstition or enthusiasm, as of Popery or Methodism, or the like, either in opinion or practice, shall prevail." "And in all the said twenty sermons," now *eight*, it is stated that "such practical observations shall be made, and such useful conclusions added, as may instruct and edify mankind."

PREFACE.

It is the principal object of the following discourses, as their title may indicate, to engage the reflection of the reader on the existence of an essential connexion between the fundamental principles of religion inculcated in Christianity, and the principles of morality. In the opinion of the Author, a chief cause of indifference to religion, and, consequently, to the particular evidences of Christianity, is either an actual disbelief of such a connexion, or an inattention to its reality and importance. Of some it is a settled conclusion, that the origin of our notions of merit and demerit, and the feelings consequent upon them, is of such a nature as to make it evident that they have answered their

great and ultimate end, when they have served the purposes of human society, and the business of this life. Others, a far greater number, would deny that particular origin to the moral sentiments, from which such a conclusion is drawn; but their own account of those sentiments appears to supply them with no powerful confirmation of the principles of the Christian religion. The Author, therefore, cannot but conclude that in order to uphold and promote the belief of Christianity—in his firm conviction the basis of a people's virtues, as well as of their hopes of happiness hereafter—that religion should be exhibited in its relation to our moral principles, as well as supported by the external evidences of its divine authority. Indeed, could he judge differently, he must hold in light esteem the works of the most eminent theologians of the Church of England: the names of Clarke and Butler may remind the reader that British divines, in defending Christianity against its opponents, have been concerned, first of all, to support it by the principles of natural religion; that is, by principles which are the rational growth of our moral nature.

Much of the diversity of opinion in works upon ethics leaves the *reality* of a moral difference in actions—the point, more particularly, at issue in reference to religion—untouched; consisting, as it does, of a diversity of theories, each reducing virtue to some single principle of action, or merely clothing it in a peculiar phraseology. Such theories are now, for the most part, but little regarded; any farther than as they severally occupy a place in the history of ethical philosophy; although the writings of their authors may be held in the highest estimation, as establishing a number of important facts, and displaying an extensive knowledge of human nature. One of these theories, however, that which reduces virtue to a principle of general benevolence, is considerably prevalent, and is treated of in the following discourses; though in detached parts of the work; for the design of the Author, in the discussion of his subject, interfered with the prosecution of a continuous, uninterrupted argument respecting it.

The ethical philosophy which directly opposes itself to the progress of religion in the mind, and is consequently the subject of one of the

following discourses, is that which explains our notions of merit and demerit in the manner adverted to, at the commencement of these prefatory remarks. It destroys the connexion between religion and morality, so far as it is judged to be perceptible to human reason; and as it has lately been supported by a subtilty of argument, and a show of system, calculated to produce a more than ordinary impression in its favour, it becomes a matter of great importance to subject it to a strict examination, with a view to the exposure of its fallacy.

Impressed as the Author is with the essential nature of the connexion between religion and morality, it may be allowed him, as a member of the University of Cambridge, to express his sense of the service which has been rendered to both by Professor Whewell, in calling attention to the Foundation of Morals, in his powerful Discourses on that subject; followed up, as it has been, by his own acceptance of the Chair of Moral Philosophy. It must, doubtless, be matter of regret, and regret akin to compunction, that Paley should have been the author to fall under the disapprobation of the

Professor, in his concern to effect an essential improvement in the ethical instruction of the university; but a large debt will be due for the works of Paley though we except his Introductory Chapters to his Moral Philosophy. To do him justice, however, on this subject, he did not abandon the reality of a moral difference in actions, whatever may be judged of that criterion of virtue which he so strongly advocated. But that reality, it must be confessed, makes no conspicuous appearance on the face of his moral philosophy. The truth appears to be, that, having assumed the truth of Christianity, his attention was, in no degree, drawn to the bearing of ethical opinions upon the principles of religion. In *this* respect he was far from being singular; for it is very observable, that when Christian authors, in the present day, apply their attention to questions on ethics, it is, in some if not most instances, with a view to enforce the propriety, and duty, of conforming our opinions upon such questions to the principles and teaching of Christianity. And doubtless it is not without reason that, in addressing believers of Christianity, they handle the subject of ethics for

this express purpose. But it deserves to be considered, whether the principles of morals are not strictly available to vindicate the truth, to confirm the belief, of Christianity itself.

The Author will add only, that his design in the following discourses brought him into a subject so extensive and various, that he was compelled either to limit his attention to a very narrow portion of it, or, with a view to its general magnitude and importance, to sacrifice his own ideas of unity and completeness in its discussion. He chose the latter course; and has effected such an approach to a continuous line of argument as he was able. The discourses are longer than is usual, portions of them having been omitted in their delivery; and notes are added for a farther development of the subject. On the whole, it is with much diffidence that, in the fulfilment of the office which he had the honour to hold, he commits the work to the press, though not without hope of a candid opinion on its imperfections.

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LECTURE I.

THE APPEAL OF CHRISTIANITY TO THE MORAL JUDGMENTS.

Rom. ii. 14, 15.

FOR WHEN THE GENTILES, WHICH HAVE NOT THE LAW, DO BY NATURE THE THINGS CONTAINED IN THE LAW, THESE, HAVING NOT THE LAW, ARE A LAW UNTO THEMSELVES: WHICH SHEW THE WORK OF THE LAW WRITTEN IN THEIR HEARTS, THEIR CONSCIENCE ALSO BEARING WITNESS, AND THEIR THOUGHTS THE MEANWHILE ACCUSING OR ELSE EXCUSING ONE ANOTHER.

It will be generally agreed that there is not a more important or distinguishing property of our intelligent nature,—by whatever name we may prefer to distinguish it, and however we may trace its growth, or analyse its principles,—than that by which we approve and disapprove particular affections of our minds, or, which is morally the same thing, such actions as are perceived to flow from them; judging them to be right or wrong; that is, attributing merit or demerit to the doers of such actions, and accounting ourselves and others to be under a

moral obligation to perform or forbear them. It is to our reason, in its cognizance of these moral judgments, that the Christian religion, primarily and to a great extent, appeals, in proposing itself to our belief, or claiming to be received as a revelation from the Author of our being; and it will be our endeavour to maintain the propriety and force of that appeal, to such an extent as the compass of a few discourses may allow. We do not forget that, in judging actions to be right and wrong, mankind are subject to peculiar feelings of complacency and aversion, of such a nature as to incline them to the former, and to restrain them from the latter; but we direct attention more particularly to the moral *judgments*, in distinction from the feelings with which they are associated, for important reasons which we shall offer in the sequel.

We have stated that Christianity, as proposed to our belief, is, primarily and to a great extent, an appeal to our reason in its cognizance of our moral judgments, or our discernment of a moral distinction in our dispositions and conduct: the design of the present discourse is to establish and explain this assertion, and, moreover, to premise conditions which appear to be necessary to entitle Christianity to a serious regard and examination, under this particular description of its claims, and which actually exist to command

attention to intrinsic indications of its truth and authority.

That the Christian religion assumes to be credible, first and principally, in virtue of its congruity to our reason, in reference to our discernment of moral distinctions, follows at once and undeniably from the fact that it demands our belief,—demands our impartial examination of the evidences of its divine authority,—as the fulfilment of a *duty* to God: thus implying the most momentous of all realities, if it be one, that we are subject to a moral obligation to the Creator: that is, that we are properly objects of a moral approbation and disapprobation, capable of merit and demerit, in our affections and conduct towards HIMSELF. If this primary assumption be consistent with a just account of the moral judgments, the demand founded upon it is so far consistent with the credibility of the Christian religion. But how is this assumption to be proved? Not, it must be manifest, from the Scripture itself, whose title to belief is, by supposition, in dispute; nor from any external evidence adducible in support of the pretensions of Scripture; for the assumption in question is, not that there are sufficient proofs of the truth of Christianity, but that we stand in a relation to the Deity which renders it our duty to collect and examine them. It is unquestionable, then, that the reality of our moral obligation to

the Deity is presumed in the Scripture to be deducible by human reason, or capable of proof on grounds independent of a divine revelation.

It is often imputed to the divines of the last century, that they have laid an undue stress on what are called the principles of natural religion; attributing to human reason the knowledge of truths which, in reality, were derived from another source. Whether they have actually exposed themselves to this animadversion, or in what manner, it is here unnecessary to inquire; but we must take occasion to observe that those who hold such principles to be entirely superfluous, or human reason to be devoid of authority, in the article of religious belief, have erred into the opposite and, as we apprehend, a far more dangerous extreme. In maintaining the Scripture to be, exclusively, the source of religious knowledge, they abandon the only ground on which they are entitled to assert, for the Scripture itself, a claim upon the attention of mankind—to assert the duty of investigating the evidence of an alleged communication from God —to assert the existence of any duty to the Creator whatsoever.

As our purpose is to deal with the principles of religious duty as implied and inculcated in the Scripture, we shall at once bring forward the original and special ground, on which it is there presumed to be agreeable to our reason to con-

clude that we are subject to a moral obligation to the Creator, or capable of merit and demerit in our affections and conduct towards himself. That ground is, that he sustains towards our species the relation of a donor or benefactor; a relation the same in nature as that which, under the same title, one human being sustains towards another; and that as, in the latter instance, such a relation imposes a moral obligation, to gratitude, on man to man, so, in the former, it imposes a similar moral obligation, to gratitude, on man to God. The Scripture not only affirms, in full concurrence with our reason, that our life and happiness are the result of a designing intelligence, the work and gift of God; but it virtually affirms, as a reasonable inference from that conclusion, that God requires us to entertain and cultivate the affection of gratitude to himself:—a principle which, it is important to remark, is essentially distinguishable from those feelings which attach us to particular individuals, not to say inferior creatures and even inanimate objects, merely as the instruments or causes of our pleasure and advantage. Feelings of this nature cannot but associate themselves with the idea of God in the belief of his benevolence; and are alone sufficient to engage mankind in the study and celebration of his works. But *gratitude,* the moral quality under that name, is essentially a principle of action; attesting its presence by a readiness to

fulfil the will of its object; to execute his command; to forward his purpose. The proposition relating to the Creator which the Scripture presumes to be agreeable to our reason, is, that he requires, in virtue of his goodness towards us, a corresponding disposition to obey his will. We consider this presumption of Christianity—(that it is a presumption of other religions likewise only aggravates its importance)—to demand our attention first and principally, because the goodness of God, or his claim to our gratitude, is set forth in the Scriptures as the fountain-head of all moral obligation to the Creator; and, moreover, because our assent to that claim is strictly antecedent to the inquiry, whether or how far his will may be collected from the constitution of our nature. For, let it be observed, in the absence of a principle of religious duty, that inquiry is one which we are wholly at liberty to prosecute or forbear: in other words, the design of the Almighty in endowing us with moral perceptions and voluntary powers, is as purely matter of curiosity and speculation, as his design in providing us with material organs of sense and motion; his design, for example, in the construction of the eye or the hand; that is, it is of no *moral* concernment, relating to the Deity, at all.[1]

[1] In premising the necessity of some principle of duty, or moral obligation, to God, dictating a regard to the indications of his will, we do not imply that a sense of duty to God is to

It may here, then, be proper to observe, that this position, Gratitude is due to God, or, more precisely, It is perfectly reasonable, in the belief of his goodness, to entertain that affection towards him, is presumed in the Scripture to be, as we shall venture to call it, a first principle of knowledge in our moral relation to the Creator. It is there implied that in perceiving the duty, or the rectitude, of gratitude to a human benefactor, we are, at once, without any previous inquiry or intermediate reasoning, prepared to perceive the duty, or the rectitude, of gratitude to God; and thus that morality, so called, is properly introductory to religion; that piety and virtue have a common root; the former being the proper growth, as well as the highest exercise, of the latter. In

be expected to spring up in a mind unfurnished with materials for reflection or inquiry on the subject of religion. Persons, it is very evident, may be acquainted with a number of arguments alleged in support of natural, as well as revealed religion; but may not consider themselves morally bound to observe and examine them, with a view to proceed to some conclusion, or actually to learn the will of God. Indeed this express duty may have scarcely engaged their attention. It is deducible, as we argued at length in a former work, from the general duty of obedience to God. This fundamental duty we are now stating to consist in his claim upon our gratitude. It will be perceived, then, that we address our argument to individuals accustomed to regard religion as matter only of opinion or speculation, and sceptical or indifferent as to our moral relation to God; not surely that we are looking for a sense of religious duty in persons ignorant of facts, unacquainted with statements, devoid of ideas, upon the subject.

dealing, then, with this implied proposition in the Scripture, namely, that we are morally bound to exercise gratitude to God, we shall point attention to the fact that it answers the description of a first principle of knowledge in one essential particular, namely, its spontaneous suggestion or instant admission to the human understanding. It may however, notwithstanding, be supposed to be founded in some erroneous apprehension; attempts may be made to disprove it. We shall therefore proceed to maintain its reasonableness, as the result of subsequent inquiry, and deliberate reflection.[1]

[1] It may be well to mention, expressly, our reason for arguing this proposition in the manner proposed. We have stated the general duty of obedience to God, (which is necessary to infer the duty of inquiring into his will,) to be founded in his goodness or claim upon our gratitude; but we are now supposing that claim itself to be brought into question; that is, we are proposing to inquire whether it be reasonable to conclude, that God demands that gratitude to himself which we acknowledge to be morally due to a human benefactor. We might, then, be asked to show a previous ground of obligation to determine this particular question. If, however, as it is intended to consider, the obligation to religious gratitude is immediately assented to by mankind in general, and has been assented to by the querist or objector himself, it must, in all reason, be concluded to be actually in force, unless it be disproved, or perceived to be founded in error.—Of course, we assume a belief of the goodness of God as well as his existence.

It should here be intimated also, that if this primary duty be allowed, our obligation to other religious affections, as veneration, &c. may be presumed to be implied, inasmuch as these are naturally connected with gratitude to a Being conceived to be of infinite knowledge and power, as well as goodness.

But, farther, the Christian religion, assuming a common ground of moral obligation for the exercise of gratitude by man to man, and by man to God, calls upon us to evince the reality of that affection to God, by the fulfilment of our duties towards our fellow-creatures. It refers us to our moral judgments, or the dictates of the conscience, for the indications of a law imposed upon us by the Creator, prescribing our conduct towards our fellow-creatures; a law which it is in our own will to obey or disregard, from gratitude or indifference to himself. It virtually affirms, as a reasonable inference from the general fact that we judge our actions to be right or wrong, that God also judges them to be right or wrong; approves or disapproves us in performing them; and in virtue of his own especial claim upon our gratitude, estimates our conduct towards our fellow-creatures as a test of our obedience to himself.[1]

We may here take occasion to mention that the principal reason which led to the selection of the present subject for discussion, was, that, without compelling a recurrence to topics that engaged our attention in a former series of discourses, it would bring under consideration the

[1] The duties towards *ourselves*, as they are called, appear to be, strictly speaking, no separate class. Temperance and fortitude, for example, are duties in a secondary sense; or obligatory upon us because essential to the fulfilment of our duties towards God and towards man.

two cardinal positions which have just been stated; namely, that we are subject to a moral obligation to the Deity, and that a sense of that obligation dictates the fulfilment of our duties towards our fellow-creatures, or enjoins the practice of virtue as an offering of piety. In maintaining the doctrine of a responsibility in reference to our religious belief, we were entitled to assume these positions; and we could not have proceeded a step in our argument without them. It is manifestly in the conviction that there *is* a duty of obedience to God, that the connexion subsisting between the understanding and the affections, supplies a ground for the inference, that we are accountable to him in reference to the tenets we embrace concerning him; and unless we take for granted that what is morally right is agreeable to his will, it must be wholly premature to maintain that the moral tendency of the Christian religion furnishes a presumptive argument of its divine original. But though, among persons avowing an indifference to a particularity of religious belief, there are many who, at the same time, profess a conviction of these fundamental principles of religion, there are, it is probable, almost as many who either have actually discarded them, or are very imperfectly convinced of their truth. Our purpose, therefore, in the following discourses, is chiefly to maintain the reasonableness of these positions, as they are founded and illustrated

in the Scriptures; inasmuch as, so founded and illustrated, they may be gathered or confirmed by reflecting on our own discernment of moral distinctions, or the approving and condemning judgments of the conscience.

But in maintaining the credibility of the Christian religion as an appeal to our moral principles, we are unwilling to limit our argument to the support of these two propositions, though of primary and most comprehensive import; and we shall proceed with a subject which, however, it were idle to attempt to lay open, in any adequate measure, in the ensuing discourses. It appears incumbent to consider in what manner these general principles are applied in that particular exposition of our duties which is laid before us in the Scriptures. We may readily suppose that the teachers of this religion, in the execution of their ostensible purpose of awakening the human race to a sense of their duty to the Creator, might have been satisfied to admonish them in general terms of the reality of his moral government over them, and the necessity of an essential amendment of their character: encouraging and urging them to the practice of all rectitude, by proclaiming the forgiveness of the penitent, assuring them of a divine aid, and announcing a future state of reward and punishment; but leaving them to acquire a particular knowledge of the will of God, or of what was morally right, by the exercise of

their own reason. Especially may we make this supposition when we reflect, that there is, in every particular age and people, a considerable unanimity of opinion, whether correct or otherwise, as to the duties of individuals, or the moral quality of particular actions; and that what is commonly judged to be most necessary is the application of more powerful motives to the practice of virtue. But Christianity opens a far wider question for the deliberate exercise of our reason on the validity of its pretensions. It assumes to describe the sure path of duty, to particularize the precepts of the Creator; and thus places itself in a position the most critical and dangerous that can be imagined to a religion emanating from no higher intelligence than that to which it appeals in the assertion of its truth; an intelligence which, however it may appreciate the forms of moral excellence when presented to its view, has, speaking generally, but ill succeeded in discovering them for itself. One ascertained error in the morality of the Gospel—one inequitable and pernicious precept attributed to the Creator—must have been fatal to its pretensions: a consideration of no little weight, whether we regard the practices taught or expressly sanctioned by other religions, or the boldness and peculiarity of some of its precepts.

Moreover our subject bears directly on the probability of *miracles*. We are concerned to

insist that a present and commanding persuasion of the reality and extent of our moral obligation to the Deity, is essential to a rational estimate of the credibility of the Scripture history, considered as a record of his special, miraculous interposition in the concerns of mankind. For if, in reading that history, we grow forgetful of our accountableness to the Creator, and consequently lose sight of the purpose which it assigns to him as the Author of a *moral* restoration to our species, we have nothing before us but a series of narrations at which to wonder; nothing but deviations from the laws of the physical universe. It is, therefore, impossible that arguments alleged in disproof of miracles in general, and, consequently, of those related in the Scripture, should be otherwise than specious and imposing; and not in the least degree surprising that they should be considered sufficiently pertinent, and decisive of the question.

There is one topic more which we shall endeavour to include in the discussion of our subject. Though, as we have seen, the Christian religion addresses itself, in the first instance, to our reason, and assumes to be extensively conformable to its dictates, it should be expressly considered that this appeal to the human understanding is accompanied with a special demand upon the *implicit* belief of mankind. More precisely, the original teachers of Christianity, while

they looked to human reason, to bear out and confirm their declarations regarding the attributes and laws of the Creator in general, as the Moral Governor of the world, professed, at the same time, to publish doctrines which, however we may speculate and determine concerning them, *they* called upon mankind to receive in deference to their special authority as the messengers of God. The connexion of the ensuing argument with this particular demand of an implicit belief, is so important and so often unconsidered in collecting the tenets of the Gospel, that we shall make it the subject of the concluding discourse.

Having so far explained our assertion at the outset, namely, that Christianity, in claiming to be accredited as a divine revelation, appeals to our reason as conversant with our moral sentiments, it is important we should now state the reasons why, in weighing that appeal, we should apply our attention more particularly to the moral judgments in distinction from the feelings with which they are naturally associated, or which they are perceived to awaken in our minds.[1]

[1] In actual experience, the judgment is the cause or occasion of the feeling by which it is accompanied. Every one explains the disgust which he feels at the conduct of another, morally considered, and the self-reproach which he suffers from his own, by alleging his *judgment* that such conduct is

Our discernment of a moral distinction in actions is attended, as has been already noticed, with certain feelings of complacency or aversion in that complex state of the mind which is entitled the *sentiment of moral approbation* or *disapprobation:* especially, in reflecting upon our *own* conduct as right or wrong, we are conscious of a peculiar satisfaction in the former instance, and of disquietude in the latter. Such feelings are evidently required to invest our moral judgments with a restraining and impelling power, or to render them practically effective; and they appear to be included in the original constitution of a moral agent. But it must be manifest that our estimate of such feelings, in their bearing

wrong. Moreover, the judgment is so far distinguishable from the corresponding or appropriate feeling that, in numerous instances, the former is quite determinate in its character, while the latter is scarcely experienced, or even entirely absent. Without question, for example, a person may judge a particular action to be wrong, and yet be sensible of little or no repugnance and dissatisfaction in committing it, or of feelings of an opposite nature in avoiding it. Indeed a keen discrimination of moral qualities in general, as well as a power of delineating character, may distinguish an individual who betrays in his whole conduct, and in various ways, a comparative obtuseness of moral sensibility. These, it must be allowed, are facts in the existing experience of the mind; however opinions may differ as to the origin of the judgments themselves, or the composition in general of the moral sentiments.—For proof, if necessary, that moral approbation implies judgment, we refer the reader to Dr. Reid's defence of that position, (Essay v. chap. 7.)

upon the reasonableness of the Christian religion, will materially depend upon the manner in which we account for the moral judgments with which they are connected; that is, upon the import which we attach to our language when we pronounce our actions to be right or wrong. If, for example, Christianity, by the clearest implication, ascribes these judgments of the understanding to our discernment of an original independent rule or standard of moral rectitude, and we, on the contrary, explain their origin in a manner which precludes a belief of that standard, it follows that the feelings which accompany such judgments can bring no argumentative support to the assumptions of the Christian religion. It is very possible, indeed, that these feelings may appear, in their peculiar nature, inconsistent with our explanation of the judgments which excite them, and incline us to question its accuracy; yet so long as we continue at issue with Christianity as to the reality of a distinction on which, in its appeal to the conscience, we perceive it to be strictly founded, it were idle to suppose that, so far as its credibility may be deducible from our moral constitution, we can entertain any rational belief of its truth. Indeed, it is notorious that accounts have been given of the formation of our ideas of virtue, which exhibit the moral character of our species under a totally different aspect from that in which it is presented

in the Scriptures; or which, rather, conduct us to the conclusion that, in the judgment of the Deity, mankind are subject to no moral approbation or disapprobation whatever; that is, that in His view, they possess no moral character at all.

But, further and more especially, it is specifically to the *understanding*, in its approval and condemnation of our dispositions and conduct, that Christianity addresses itself, in assuming to be a most credible account of our moral relation to the Creator, and a most reasonable exposition of human duties. It is to our judgment as to what we *ought* to feel, and how we *ought* to act, that it takes upon itself to reason with us on the part of the Deity, and not to our experience as to what we *do* feel, or how we *do* act: and it must be abundantly evident that until we have ascertained our moral character as to what it *ought* to be, or have decided upon our explanation of such a phraseology, we cannot interpret correctly our experience as to what our character *is*. This distinction, so essential, has been remarkably overlooked in theories relating to virtue, or the principles of morals; propounded, as they often have been, in a spirit unfriendly to Christianity, and indeed to all practical religion. For instance—It is, say some, in obedience to the voice of society, that individuals restrain themselves from actions stigmatized as vicious, and practise what is called virtue: it is that they may not

incur the hostility of their fellow-creatures; that they may secure their countenance and win their plaudits. In support of this assertion, they allege a number of instances proving, beyond question, that a regard to the estimation and favour of society is an exceedingly powerful, and often, apparently, the only effective inducement to conduct accounted virtuous. The inference pressed upon their readers is, that the principles of conduct inculcated in Scripture have no rational foundation in the structure of the human mind. They do not perceive that what they have to establish against Christianity, is, not that mankind are actually swayed by a regard to the favour of their fellow-creatures, but that they judge it to be right to yield to such a master-principle of conduct. If they could make it evident that they deliberately approve themselves in the performance of virtuous actions, so called, from no other and higher motive than a desire to conciliate the feelings of their fellow-creatures, then, unquestionably, the human conscience would bear no witness to the moral data of Christianity. The lamp of reason, as it shines upon the pages of the Bible, would indeed grow dim, and help us but little to discern in its injunctions the characters of truth, and the expression of the Creative Mind. But suppose, on the contrary, we inwardly condemn, while we fully admit, the extensive prevalency of such a prin-

ciple of conduct—nay, that we involuntarily despise and loathe the character formed and dependent upon it, the theory which resolves all virtue into its influence and ascendency, so far from exposing a fallacy in the principles of Christianity, lends a most powerful confirmation to its history and portraiture of human nature; confirming or, rather, exaggerating the account which it has given us of the degeneracy and corruption of our moral principles. And thus it is that those expositors of the Scripture who maintain the total depravity of our nature, could find no better proofs and illustrations of their tenet, than would be given them by the advocates of a theory, the object of which is to show that the rectitude, or holiness, assumed in the Scripture to be proper to our species, is wholly imaginary, and, consequently, that the depravity imputed to them can have no existence.[1]

[1] To take an eminent example which has been followed by many—Hobbes, the drift of whose philosophy, it is here enough to say, is to prove that right is created by power, and to establish the reasonableness of a predominating and exclusive regard to our own individual interest, sets out in his speculations on the origin and bonds of society with what might well appear to have been intended as a searching and pungent exposure of the actual selfishness of mankind:—"Quo autem consilio homines congregentur, ex iis cognoscitur quæ faciunt congregati. Si coëant enim commercii causâ, unusquisque non socium, sed rem suam colit. Si officii causâ, nascitur forensis quædam amicitia, plus habens mutui metûs quam amoris; unde factio aliquando nascitur, sed benevolentia

We have yet other matter to premise, which, however it may detain our attention, appears to be strictly preliminary to the discussion of our subject; as well as essential to a just conception of its momentous nature. In advocating Christianity on the ground of its congruity to our reason as moral agents, we must premise that it addresses itself to an intelligence common to

nunquam. Si animi et hilaritatis causâ, solet maximè perplacere sibi unusquisque iis rebus, quæ risum excitant, unde possit, (prout est natura ridiculi,) comparatione turpitudinis vel infirmitatis alienæ, ipse sibimet commendatior evadere." . . . (*Elementa Philosophica de Cive*, cap. i.) Now if this, and more in the same strain, were a strictly correct and unexaggerated account of the feelings and dispositions of mankind as members of society, would it furnish any solid argument for the opinions which it is intended to support? Not, surely, unless it were taken for granted that what men *ought* to be is ascertained and explained by what they *are*. A disciple of Hobbes would be forced to admit that, in point of fact, mankind are subject to shame and self-reproach in consequence of an eager and engrossing pursuit of their own advantage, and a comparative indifference to the interests and feelings of others;—but for what reason, if their conduct as it *ought* to be is to be collected from what it *is*? Doubtless he would say, that in accusing themselves and others of an undue, inordinate desire to promote their own ends, they betray an unacquaintance with the principles of their own nature:—which is just, in effect, to say that, let an author crowd his pages as he will with examples of an exclusive regard to the indulgence and aggrandizement of self, it is difficult and, in most instances, impossible to make men believe that what they ought to be may be learned from what they are; or that their duties are made known by their practices.

mankind in general, as well as to that more intimate knowledge of the human mind which may be acquired by a particular study of its laws and operations. It cannot be allowed, as a bare *hypothesis*, with reference to a religion of divine institution, asserting its title to the earnest and impartial investigation of all to whom it may be offered, on the ground of a conformity in its practical principles with their own perceptions of a moral good and evil in their affections and conduct—it cannot be allowed, that, in order to discern that conformity, it should be necessary to trace back those perceptions of good and evil, of virtue and vice, to their primitive elements or earliest formation in the human mind—necessary to account for the authority of the conscience, as it is termed, by assigning those separate conceptions and feelings, which, by a peculiar association and an increasing force, may be *presumed* to have raised that approving and condemning power within us, and invested it with its apparently rightful supremacy as the dictator of our conduct. If propositions forming the groundwork of the Christian system be barely *supposed* to be entitled to belief, in virtue of their conformity to our moral judgments, these judgments must also be supposed to convey that import which Christianity attaches to them, or to impress that conclusion on the understanding which Christianity assumes to be derived from them,

with a corresponding force and universality of evidence ;—an evidence antecedent to speculative or philosophical inquiry, and, in no ordinary measure, independent of its results ; bearing an important, though qualified, resemblance to the evidence of the senses. We shall better explain this condition of the great question before us, if we refer to that view of moral obligation which is actually prevalent in the world. It is natural to mankind so to understand their moral judgments, as to infer the existence of a proper, independent standard of moral rectitude. In other words, they conclude that there is strictly a *reality* in moral distinctions ; and that their discernment of that difference in their actions, which they signify by the terms "right" and "wrong," is not accounted for by their tendency to promote and impair the happiness of the community ; still less by their consequent tendency to provoke the resentment, and engage the favour of the community, and thereby to affect, in various ways, their own security and enjoyment. It is this specific conclusion which has appeared to support, and, as we apprehend, is absolutely necessary to support, the assumption of all Scripture, that we are constituted to entertain and act upon a sense of duty to the Creator, and, in our conduct in general, to account ourselves subject to his approving and condemning judgment. We are concerned, then, to premise that it is precisely

because that conclusion—namely, that there is a real, independent standard of moral rectitude—impresses itself spontaneously upon the human understanding, and even when disowned in speculation, adheres to it with a remarkable tenacity, that we can allow the presumption to be in any degree probable, that the Deity has appealed to the dictates of the conscience, in confirmation of a particular declaration of his will, or exposition of his moral government. If the case were otherwise, if our moral judgments were of such a nature as that whether they were significant of an original and permanent standard of moral rectitude, was purely a matter of inquiry, or determinable by argument,—if we did not perceive them to be so by an evidence naturally or, seemingly, by intuition attaching to them,—we might at once decide that the Deity had never required us to apply such judgments in corroboration of a communication from himself. In other words, there would be the strongest presumption that we had not been created for that moral subjection to God, which the Scripture implies to be consonant to our reasonable nature, and asserts to be actually required at our hands.

The argument from analogy may here be resorted to with some advantage. The Almighty, we know, has created us for the tenancy and use of the world in which he has placed us, by such a constitution of our faculties as that we

naturally believe the reality of the objects around us, or rely upon the report of the senses. But we know also that objections have been raised to the existence of the material world, or arguments put forth to contravene the report of the senses. Now, let it be supposed that the Deity had left us to be sensibly affected by reasoning of this nature, and to grow inert and motionless under its influence, or that he had not, by the same power which had brought us into existence, secured and perpetuated such an ever-present predominating impression of the reality of the surrounding world, as to supply a continual and effective stimulus to our active powers,—would it be true, on that supposition, that he had *created* our species for the possession and enjoyment of the material world, or for the knowledge and application of its laws? We may apply this supposition to our experience as moral agents, when the question is mooted whether it be consonant to reason to conclude, that the Deity has designed us for the purposes of a moral creation as set forth in the Scriptures,—that is, for a voluntary obedience to himself, and a happiness consequent on a faithful adherence to his will. We could not argue the affirmative of this question, we could not propose a discussion in its favour, unless it were plainly answerable to some persuasion of mankind which, like that of an essential *reality* in moral

distinctions, grew and prevailed amongst them by the unbidden action of the human understanding, and opposed a certain powerful resistance to other and contradictory conclusions:—we say a *certain powerful* resistance, because it is not to be forgotten that, in our capacity as moral agents, the preservation of necessary truth, as well as its practical efficacy, must depend in some measure, and it may be difficult to determine to what extent, on the voluntary use of our faculties. Mankind are confessedly betrayed into error, and often egregious error, in applying the commonly acknowledged standard of rectitude to the estimation of particular actions; by the operation of various causes, but most of all by the influence of self-love and the bias of the passions. It were therefore no matter for wonder, if they should be accessible to doubt and scepticism as to the existence of the standard itself, even presuming that they were morally constituted to perceive it; still less if they were brought to dispute its existence in compliance with reasoning which left them subject, notwithstanding, to close and besetting impressions of its reality; and which displayed its efficacy rather by creating an opinion of the fallacy of the common persuasion, than in disengaging them from the persuasion itself.

We are premising a condition of all reasonable argument in support of Christianity, as an appeal

to the dictates of the conscience, which merits especial observation from inquirers into the foundation of morals; both from those who receive it as a divine revelation, and those who have abandoned the belief of its principles. The former as well as the latter have shown a disposition to *theorize* on the subject of ethics; adopting explanations of virtue, or the sense of moral obligation, remote from prevailing apprehensions, and with difficulty, if at all, perceived to infer the existence of religious duties: either overlooking the assumption of Scripture, that there is a proper connexion between morality and religion perceptible to human reason; or not reflecting that if there be such a connexion, it must present itself under that view of moral obligation which is instant and predominant to the minds of men; and that, consequently, so far as the truth of Christianity is involved in the principles of morals, it is, specifically, *that* view, and no other, which demands our close and most serious attention. The task of the sceptical moralist is to adduce conclusive proof, either that the persuasion to which we have adverted is itself founded in error, or that it lends no valid confirmation to the presumptions of Scripture. Inquiries into the principles of morals, we are well aware, have given rise to difficult questions, and may lead to interminable speculation. The same may be said

of the origin of the universe, or the question whether God exists. What we desire should be considered is, that if we be constituted to recognise a law of the Creator imposed upon us as voluntary agents, or to realize his moral government over us, it must be chiefly by the efficacy of reasoning akin to that which commands the belief of his existence,—reasoning which it is not in the power of a few only to comprehend and appreciate, but which is level, as it is cogent, to the understanding of all.[1]

[1] It may be well to remark that, in discussions upon the moral distinctions, questions are raised, and opinions adopted, relating to processes of thought and feeling, which not only require a particular study of the mind to be ascertained; but which, if ascertained, are confessedly productive of no practical conclusions, and consequently immaterial to the subject of religion. To take an example or two. We observed in the preceding note, that mankind explain the *feeling* with which they look upon an action, morally considered, by alleging their judgment that it is right or wrong. Some, however, refer the origin of the judgments entirely to the feelings: that we judge actions right and wrong is, as they conceive, strictly the effect of the emotions with which we are formed to contemplate them. This opinion is held by Dr. Brown, (Philosophy of the Mind, Lect. 73.) "What we mean," he observes, "by the moral difference of actions is their tendency to excite one emotion rather than another." At the same time he decidedly maintains the distinctions of morality to be real and immutable; dwelling upon the peculiar nature of the emotions in question, and the fact that, notwithstanding apparent exceptions which he expressly treats of, they are universally awakened by the same difference in actions. We are not, then, concerned to dispute his particular theory, as to the source of

There is another condition of the question before us which remains to be stated. It is often sought to undermine our belief of propositions relating to religion, and our reliance on the arguments supporting them, by alleging that such propositions have not been suggested in the course of our own investigation; but have been impressed upon us by the authority of writings believed to have been penned under divine inspiration. Now, we should entirely concur in the stress laid upon this consideration, were it urged with the intention of rousing and stimulating the readers of Scripture to an independent use of their judgment on the principles which it lays before them; but it must be useless to offer an argument in support of such principles, unless it be distinctly premised that,

our conceptions of "right" and "wrong;" though we believe it to be very insufficient, and open to objections which it would be impossible to answer. As another example, we may notice the opinion of Sir James Mackintosh, as to a peculiar process of association among our thoughts and feelings, described or adverted to in various parts of his work on the Progress of Ethical Philosophy: a process which he conceives to have been possible, or, rather, concludes to have actually taken place, in the formation of the moral sentiments. He considers such a process, however, matter of "purely philosophical" inquiry; and we here refer to it with no other view than to suggest the importance, with reference to opinions on the subject of ethics, of distinguishing between such as are merely speculative in their nature, and such as may throw a light upon questions of practical interest and moment.

however they have been introduced to our thoughts, we are competent to form some correct determination as to their truth or fallacy; and if, on the contrary, it be actually taken for granted that, seeing we have received them in connexion with our earliest impressions of truth and reality, we are unable to verify them by our own reason, or can succeed only in confuting them. These principles must be presumed to lie open to discussion on their own merits, or it must be idle to undertake either to support or oppose them. To insist on so indispensable a preliminary to all rational inquiry, may well appear unnecessary; but we are compelled to remark, that the custom which obtains with some, of depreciating the religious convictions of mankind by referring them to the influence of authority, or the growth of mere education, would, if yielded to, prevent us from advancing a step in the knowledge of the Deity, and even debar us from inquiring into the proofs of his existence. It would fix us to the vacuity and darkness of atheism itself, so far as any apprehension of the being of God depended, strictly, on the use of our own faculties: for though we affirm his existence to be deducible by reason, yet we entirely believed it antecedently to any exercise of our own judgment upon it whatever. The being of God can be no more matter of discovery, strictly speaking, to the theologian, than the

principle of gravitation to the astronomer, or the circulation of the blood to the student of anatomy,—than facts without number, of which, notwithstanding, we are in no degree doubtful because they were commended to our belief by others, or, rather, were completely believed before we had looked into the proofs of their reality. But we need dwell no longer on an objection to religious opinions, which would apply to by far the larger portion of human knowledge, and not only unsettle our reliance on probable truth, or moral evidence, but even disturb the foundation of the sciences.

It deserves to be remarked, however, that the *defence* of Christianity has, not unfrequently, been conducted in a manner calculated to restrain the exercise of our own understanding on the intrinsic credibility of the Scripture as an account of our moral relations to the Creator; both by those who have argued its conformity with the deductions of reason, and those who have maintained its truth by historical and other testimony to the divine inspiration of its authors. The former appear to have evinced an undue solicitude in collecting, to the support of Christian principles, the results of human inquiry on the matter of religion, in ages preceding the publication of the Gospel; while the latter have depreciated the capabilities of reason in this department of inquiry, and unduly narrowed its province,

in their concern to establish the necessity and advantages of the Christian revelation. It has not been sufficiently considered that the question with ourselves who possess the Scriptures, is, not what others have believed or conjectured, or what we ourselves should have believed if this volume had never come into our hands; but what we now discern to be true, with its pages spread open before us. The reasonings of other men in other circumstances, besides their intrinsic interest, may be greatly useful in prompting our own investigation, and assisting us to form our own conclusions; but it is to ourselves, as individuals, it is to the reason and conscience of each one amongst us, that the Scripture makes its appeal, in assuming to characterise our nature in the judgment of God, and to describe the path of rectitude, the way to his right hand. Do we, then, as individuals, perceive in its pages the indications of truth, and the mind of Him who made us? Or do we detect an error in its principles, and wonder at the presumption of its authors?

We shall observe, however, consistently with the scope of our argument, that they who hold a measure of religious knowledge to be originally attainable by the powers of reason, so far from disparaging the value of the Scripture as a divine revelation, espouse an opinion directly corroborative of its own declarations; for it plainly affirms

that the existence, and unity, and also the moral government of the Divine Being might have been collected from the structure of the external world, and the frame of the human mind; and it holds up the superstition and idolatry prevalent among the heathen as a melancholy but instructive proof of the proneness of mankind, when left to the unresisted impulse of their passions, to conceive the most fallacious and demoralizing ideas of the Supreme Power, and thus to confirm and aggravate their own corruptions. What the world stood in need of, with reference to *such* truths, was some effective stimulus to inquiry and reflection; and in this respect Christianity has conferred a benefit on the human race which it were impossible to calculate. The mass of men had sunk, and had lain for ages, in gross insensibility to their most essential duties; and whether in the absence of the Gospel they would ever have been awakened to their reality and extent, is, to say the most, only matter for conjecture.[1]

[1] A similar observation may be made with reference to many an individual reclaimed from habitual vice and irreligion. It is highly probable that, but for the statements made to him, and the counsel given him, by another, he would have continued insensible to his duties to the end of his life; nevertheless, he was convinced of the truth of those statements, and the wisdom of that counsel, in the exercise of his own reason; and the views which now regulate his conduct are strictly independent of the character and fate of the person to whom he so materially owes them.

But we owe a debt to Christianity far exceeding this; and we cannot but add, that to attribute, as is not uncommon, every just and worthy conception of the Supreme Being, which may be met with in the writings of the ancient heathen, to some traditionary acquaintance with the Jewish religion,—as though the whole of their intelligence regarding him must, of necessity, have been nothing more than a distant refraction of that light which had illumined the region of Judea,—is most unnecessary, with a view to establish the worth and privileges of such a revelation as the Gospel offers to our acceptance. For what is the burden of that heavenly message, if we receive it as such? That "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life;" that "we have redemption through the blood of Christ, even the forgiveness of sins;" that "he gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works;" and that "in working out our own salvation he worketh in us to will and to do of his own good pleasure"—his own benevolence.[1] Was it ever presumed that human reason could have anticipated such communications as these from the throne of the Almighty—could have conceived or hoped such a method and fulness of divine

[1] ὑπὲρ τῆς εὐδοκίας. Phil. ii. 13.

forgiveness as the Gospel makes known to us—such a refuge for the stricken conscience, and repose to the restless spirit—such encouragement to our penitence—such an assurance of everlasting happiness to beings oppressed with the consciousness of guilt, and beset with the fear of death? Are communications such as these disparaged in our estimation, when we judge it to be the office of reason to recognise, in our mental constitution, the principles of duty which bind us to the service of the Creator, and connect us with a future state? Disparaged! What are such communications without this exercise of our reason?—for to whom are they made? To whom is the Gospel addressed but to beings actually accountable to God for their doings, and with greatly more to fear than to hope at his hands?—beings *formed to appreciate the truth and justice* of that accusation which it brings against them as transgressors?—"Whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent."[1]

[1] Acts xiii. 26.

LECTURE II.

THE REASONABLENESS OF GRATITUDE TO GOD.

1 *John* iv. 20.

HE THAT LOVETH NOT HIS BROTHER WHOM HE HATH SEEN, HOW CAN HE LOVE GOD WHOM HE HATH NOT SEEN?

In estimating the credibility of the Christian religion as an appeal to our reason, with reference to our moral judgments, the first proposition that presents itself in those writings in which its principles are unfolded, is, that the Deity requires us to entertain and cultivate towards him the affection of gratitude, as morally due to him in virtue of his benevolence towards us. It can admit of no doubt that this is the affection directly inculcated in that commandment, which Christianity affirms to be the first and great commandment of the Creator—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God;" though, unquestionably, there are other religious affections which grow up in connexion with the culture of gratitude, and conspire to enlarge and animate the love of God. In this implied proposition,

then, Christianity, as we have expressly stated, makes the assumption that the duty of gratitude from man to man is rationally preparatory to the duty of gratitude from man to God; that is, that the former is coincident in its nature with the latter. The passage which has just been cited from the Scriptures—"For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how shall he love God whom he hath not seen?"—appears to be especially worthy of attention, as showing how completely this view of our subject is taken up and implied by the original teachers of Christianity. The writer of that passage rejects, as a perfect delusion, the notion that we can be actuated by a principle of duty towards the Creator, while we are careless to fulfil our duties towards our fellow-creatures; and he accordingly insists that if a man be wanting in that love which is due to a fellow-creature, it may at once be inferred that he is regardless of that which is due to God:—"If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" The reasoning of the writer, we are aware, is specifically this:—If the relations in which we stand to our fellow-creatures, with whom we become acquainted, and with whom we hold intercourse, through the medium of the senses, fail to inspire us with appropriate affec-

tions towards them, it is not to be expected that we can realize such affections towards a Being invisible to our bodily eyes, impalpable to our senses; whose presence and agency, to be rightly apprehended by creatures so much the subjects of sense as we are, must demand a special and habitual application of our thoughts. But it is not in this point of view,—in which, however, it would furnish important matter for reflection,—that the passage has suggested itself in connexion with our subject. We have selected it for the purpose of remarking, how unquestionably the Scripture *assumes*, that in judging a certain affection, gratitude for example, to be right towards a fellow-creature, we are rationally prepared to infer that a similar affection is morally due towards God. The distinction which the Christian teacher more particularly points out between morality, so called, and religion,—or more properly, between the exercise of right affections towards God and towards man,—regards only a difference in the media through which we commune with God and with our fellow-creatures; but, in remarking that distinction, he manifestly proceeds on an assumption, which, if well founded, cannot but raise the most exalted conceptions of our moral nature, and render its full development, its proper and effective culture, an object of transcendent interest, and incomparable moment. It is, that whatever be the

other various and great uses of virtue, or however essential the upright heart and conduct to the happiness of mankind in the present life, one and, manifestly, the principal end of our creation as moral agents, is, that in sustaining particular relations towards our fellow-creatures, and cherishing those affections towards them which we consequently judge to be right and just, we may perceive and appreciate certain analogous relations connecting us with our Creator, and be prepared to yield HIM also such affections as are therefore due to him: that thus the rational mind may be appealed to and attracted by the Author of all good; be led to all rectitude by his claims and excellence; and finally satisfied with the eternal fruition of his presence. The Scripture instructs us that in allowing our affections, in their moral character, to terminate on the creature, we withhold them from that Being who is supremely entitled to them, and leave them to fail of their infinitely highest use and destination: suffering those wings to decay and perish, with which the soul is furnished to rise above a merely present and terrestrial happiness, and soar to immortality and perfection.

In maintaining the particular proposition before us, we may take for granted the reality of that goodness which, in the judgment of Scripture, establishes a claim to our gratitude on the part of the Creator. We may presume, more-

over, that this attribute of his nature must engage the feelings of mankind in their mere sensibility to pain and pleasure, and thereby render him an attractive object of human contemplation. Its influence, in this respect, may indeed considerably vary with the speculative views of individuals, and not a little with their particular temperament, and the aspect of surrounding circumstances. Our belief of the divine beneficence may naturally kindle the hope of a happier life than the present, and animate the imagination with celestial visions; or it may serve to reconcile the mind to this mixed condition of existence, and help us to tutor our spirit to a stoical endurance of suffering, as the result of a necessity to which God and man are alike subject; or it may leave us to brood, in deep perplexity, over that large amount of misery, that universal exposure to innumerable ills, which we perceive to be compatible with the constitution of a world displaying, notwithstanding, undeniable proofs of the benevolence of its Author. But however the goodness of the Deity may operate on our hopes and fears, or whether it add to the disgust or the love of life, it cannot but prompt a natural affection towards him; for it cannot but awaken feelings of an agreeable nature. A persuasion that the Creator of the universe is a benevolent Being, must needs afford us some comfort and satisfaction, when

we contemplate his stupendous power, and consider our absolute dependence upon him. We must here advert to such feelings in order to distinguish them from a sense of *duty* to the Creator, with which, in the judgment of Scripture, they are properly united; and admitted to be so by the generality of mankind; however this admission may need to be regarded as to the extent of its import, or the consequences which it involves. The one great question of personal concernment that may present itself, with reference to the goodness of the Deity is, whether it be properly a reason for that gratitude towards him which we judge to be morally right, or approve ourselves in entertaining, towards a human benefactor; and which we realize in a readiness to *act* in pursuance of his will and purpose, or to acknowledge practically the kindness which he has shown us.[1]

[1] It is most essential to distinguish these effects of kindness, or beneficence, on its object, and we are led to remark this distinction more particularly, by the perusal of an "Analysis of the Phenomena of the Mind," by J. Mill, Esq., Author of the History of British India, &c.: a work which contains an explanation of the moral sentiments that dissevers them entirely, as we apprehend, from the principles of natural religion; and which, displaying, as it does, unusual acuteness and capacity for mental analysis, may well be supposed to promote the opinions which it advocates, or to raise a prepossession in their favour. This author, in explaining the formation of our moral sentiments, assigns a very prominent place to the pleasure derived from the thought of whatever is regarded as a cause

Let it be considered, then, that the proposition under discussion, that gratitude is due to

of pleasure to ourselves; and, with reference to the dispositions of our fellow-creatures, he makes this true and important observation:—"From our earliest infancy we have had experience of nothing more constantly than this—that a great proportion of our pleasures proceeded from a certain disposition towards us, on the part of our fellow-creatures who were near us; and a great proportion of our pains from a certain other disposition on their part. These dispositions, taken in the most general sense, are kindness, and its opposite, unkindness. We have, therefore, very intense associations of pleasure with the idea of the disposition towards us called kindness in other men; and very intense associations of pain with that of the disposition in them called unkindness towards us." (Vol. ii. p. 189.) Now, it is manifestly consistent with this general observation, that the kindness of the Creator towards us should create associations of a pleasurable nature with the idea of his disposition towards us. But we find that this author, in his account of the effects of kindness upon us, takes no particular notice of our perception or sense of a duty, dictating some suitable practical acknowledgment of the kindness evinced towards us by any individual, or operating as a motive in our conduct towards him; although this sense of duty is familiar to every man's consciousness, and however it may be traced or accounted for, is perfectly distinct from the pleasurable associations which he has put so conspicuously forward. That Mr. Mill would have explained this particular state of mind, this effect of kindness, in a manner consistent with his analysis of our moral sentiments in general, there can be no doubt. Indeed, we may presume that he would have referred it to the "favourable disposition" of our fellow-creatures, which we procure by a reciprocation of benefits, as by all other acts of virtue whatsoever: (a theory of morals which is the subject of our fifth discourse.) But his omission to notice a sense of duty among the effects of kindness is remarkable; at least, it leaves much of those effects entirely unexplained; for as to

the Divine Being, is one which, on its first suggestion, commands the immediate assent of man-

the "intense associations of pleasure with the idea of a certain disposition called kindness towards us," these, every one must know, are often sorely broken in upon and put to flight by the sense of duty in question, the fulfilment of which is generally described as an act of gratitude. In some, indeed, those who, in the common acceptation, "love the right," this sense of duty supplies a most powerful and satisfying principle of action; but how often does it disturb and oppress the recipient of a benefit, and even render the individual, who would otherwise have been the source of "intense associations of pleasure," an object, if not of dislike, yet certainly of avoidance. In truth, this is the *moral* expression, so to speak, of the aspect of kindness; and its effect upon the feelings of its object is especially decisive as to his regard for virtue.

Let it be added that the sense of duty becomes peculiarly distinct and conspicuous among the effects of kindness, when these are viewed in connexion with Mr. Mill's explanation of the active power of virtue. Speaking of those acts "for which we have the generical name of virtue," he observes, "the man who has acquired, from habit, the facility of associating with those acts the pleasures which result from them, is perfectly virtuous," (p. 240.) Now, in addition to the pleasurable associations already mentioned, connected with the idea of another's kindness towards us, "we have," so this author elsewhere remarks, "associations of pleasure with all the pleasurable feelings of a fellow-creature, and therefore associations of pleasure with those acts of ours which yield him pleasure," (p. 239.) Yet, notwithstanding this two-fold chain of pleasurable associations, attracting us to a practical acknowledgment of the kindness shown to us, a reluctant and grudging discharge of this duty is matter of common observation; so much so, that of all debts, it is believed, none are more willingly forgotten than those of gratitude. From the common aversion to the remembrance of benefits received, Seneca derives a lesson of prudence in the matter of bestowing them:—"Si arbitrium dandi

kind in general, however slow or partial may be its operation on the springs of human action: answering, in this respect, as was intimated in our first discourse, the description of a first principle of knowledge in our moral relation to the Creator. Whatever question may be afterwards raised upon this proposition, it never, we may be sure, presents itself in a questionable shape on its first appearance to any human being; or, rather, it so naturally enters and commends itself to man's understanding, that however long it may remain unobserved, yet, when brought into view, it never appears to have been absent. Disbelievers of Christianity, for the most part, would hardly assert that, surrounded, as we are, with manifestations of the goodness of God, and regarding him as the Giver of all the good we have received or anticipate, it is, notwithstanding, unreasonable to infer the duty, the moral propriety, of gratitude towards him. Their argument against the Christian religion is, not that, in demanding our gratitude to God, it enjoins a duty in itself incongruous to our reason; one which he cannot be reasonably supposed to

penes nos est, præcipue mansura quæremus, ut quam minime mortale munus sit. Pauci enim sunt tam grati, ut quod acceperint, etiam si non vident, cogitent. Ingratis quoque memoria cum ipso munere incurrit: ubi ante oculos est, et oblivisci sui non sinit, sed auctorem suum ingerit et inculcat."—*De Benef.* lib. i.

require; but that it makes the demand on no valid or sufficient ground; that it offers no adequate and touching appeal to that affection of the upright heart; but, on the contrary, exhibits, as the moral Governor and Judge of the world, a Being whom they cannot identify with the Author of the universe;—one who, so far from affecting them with sentiments of gratitude and devotion, would fill them, in the belief of his existence, with aversion and dismay. This objection to the Scriptures it is proper should receive some reply; but, in alluding to it here, we have only to remark, that it implies an acknowledgment that the duty of gratitude to God is not the point in dispute; that this, itself, is perfectly agreeable to reason.

In truth, we may detect a secret assent of the understanding to the moral obligation of gratitude to the Creator in the most sceptical of mankind, who have not abandoned the belief of his existence. At least, it is observable that the men who differ from the mass of their fellow-creatures in regarding the judgments of the conscience as significant of the divine government over them, and premonitory of a future retribution, appear to agree with the rest of the world in concluding, that, were they apprised of a law imposed upon them, as voluntary agents, by the Creator, they should hold themselves bound in rectitude to observe it. What they have

questioned and denied is, the sufficient proof of the existence of such a law; not that, could the law itself be authenticated, and laid open in legible characters, it would be right, or their duty, to study and obey it. Now, how shall we account for this universal though tacit impression, this implied understanding on all hands, of an obligation to obey the Creator, were he to lay any injunctions upon us? Will it suffice to remark, that men are willing enough to allow a claim of duty upon them, so long as it lies dormant in generalities and abstractions, or is matter of merely verbal acknowledgment; and that it is not till it takes the shape of a specific command or prohibition, and stands in the way of their inclinations and purposes, that they are provoked to question and confute it? Or shall we allege the idea of God's resistless power, and say, that our capacity for happiness or misery at his hands is the only argument that could satisfy our reason for obedience to his will, were we under subjection to his government? Rather, is there not here an inner irrepressible response of the intellect, if not the heart, of man to that appeal which is made to the sense of duty in the manifestations of the divine benevolence?—an appeal made to us from the *past*, as well as from the future; and addressed to us, we may add, from all nature, by unnumbered voices, the countless ministers of the Almighty's goodness;

renewed again and again to our sluggish ear, and iterated to the end of life?[1]

[1] Hobbes broadly maintains that God's right of dominion (jus regnandi) is derived from his omnipotence; and that man is under an obligation to obey him on account of his weakness (propter imbecillitatem); and this was at least consistent with his general doctrine, that power was the sole foundation of right. He was aware that such a view of religion would somewhat shock the feelings of his readers; but we need not cite the quaint and singular arguments by which he endeavours to defend it. (De Cive, cap. xv.)

Most readers of Paley, we believe, are dissatisfied with his reply to the question, Why am I obliged to obey the will of God? and, indeed, to the general question, Why am I obliged to do what is right? And it must be confessed, that he has *here* expressed his sentiments in a manner which might lead us to infer, that he entertained very much the same notion of moral obligation as that of Hobbes. "As we should not be obliged," he says, "to obey the laws, or the magistrate, unless rewards or punishments, pleasure or pain, somehow or other depended upon our obedience; so neither should we without the same reason be obliged to do what is right, to practise virtue, or to obey the commands of God." But let us place, by the side of this passage, the following, in which he describes "the scope of Christianity as a revelation":—"Its direct object," he observes, "is to supply motives and not rules; sanctions and not precepts. And these were what mankind stood most in need of. The members of civilized society can, in all ordinary cases, judge tolerably well how they ought to act: but without a future state, or which is the same thing, without accredited evidence of that state, they want a *motive* to their duty; they want, at least, strength of motive sufficient to bear up against the force of passion, and the temptation of present advantage." (Evidences, part ii. chap. 2.) Here Paley states, as clearly as possible, that the knowledge of virtue, rectitude, duty, is acquired independently of the hope of reward, or fear of punishment. He held, indeed, that the

However that be, it is essential to observe that the assent immediately given to the reasonableness of gratitude to God, and given, it may be, for many years past, must be held to be actually binding upon us, unless that assent be

rectitude of actions was to be collected from their expediency on the whole; and premising, as he did, the divine authority of the Scriptures, he was not concerned to exhibit a common basis for morality and religion; but with such a passage before us as that which has just been cited, we cannot doubt that he fully believed the human mind to be formed for the perception of moral distinctions irrespective of an expectation of rewards and punishments. Indeed in the passage first cited, when speaking of an obligation to do what is right, he recognises a sense of rectitude to be prior to and distinct from *that* particular obligation which he troubled himself so unnecessarily to explain. In truth, the cause of his penning this infelicitous sentence, for so we must regard it, was his attempting to limit the import of a word in a manner unauthorized by custom. In the ordinary acceptation of language, the moral rectitude of a man, and the fulfilment of his moral "obligations," signify precisely the same thing. The pressure of necessity and compulsion, the "violent motive urging us to do a thing" of which Paley speaks, is something essentially different. (Moral Phisophy, b. ii. ch. iii.)

With reference to rewards and punishments, let it be remembered that both piety and virtue dictate the use of whatever means may be afforded us for their own advancement in the mind. Our fears and hopes from the power of God cannot create the moral obligation to obey him; but if they arrest and fix the attention to this obligation, and thereby impress it more deeply on the mind; if they tend to superinduce, as is proved by experience, a firmer and more effective sense of duty to him; are we not bound, by the moral obligation itself, to cherish the expectation, if well founded, of rewards and punishments hereafter?

clearly perceived to have been given under a misapprehension: unless we have made the discovery, that the duty in question has stolen its rapid way into our convictions under the disguise of a false presumption; and owes the influence which it may still exert upon our thoughts and feelings, strictly, to the power of habit. It is undoubtedly proper to an intelligent being to retrace his own conclusions, and, if necessary, to revise them, be they ever so prompt and determinate:—though it must be added, that, in questioning the conclusion before us, that gratitude is due to the Creator, an individual should be concerned to disengage his understanding, not only from the influence which may belong to it as an early and, it may be, a cherished prepossession, or merely as the effect of education, but also from a bias of present inclinations and wishes, which it is easy to perceive must be adverse to the conviction of its truth. For we can hardly presume that the duty of gratitude to God can be reasonably suffered to terminate in words, or be satisfied with nothing more than ascriptions of praise, or a flow of the feelings, to the Source of all happiness. It will assuredly be found to dictate, together with the fulfilment of our especial duties to its Supreme object, a course of rectitude towards our fellow-creatures, as an exemplification of obedience to himself. And we need but be reminded that if it be

reasonable to entertain this affection towards the Deity at all, it must be equally so to nourish it to its utmost strength and energy; to raise it into a dominant principle of action; preparing us for whatever effort of self-restraint, or sacrifice of present inclination, may be required in obedience to the divine will.

Now we are prepared to admit that, if it be ascertained, on reflection, that we judge our gratitude to be virtuous, or approve ourselves and others in feeling and cherishing it, towards a human being in virtue of some property belonging to it which cannot be affirmed of gratitude as a principle of conduct towards the Creator, the Christian religion is incapable of proof or corroboration from our reason in its cognizance of our moral judgments; for in professing to announce the first and great commandment of the Deity, it undeniably implies, as we have seen, that the duty of gratitude to a human benefactor is rationally introductory to the duty of gratitude to God,—that is, that the latter may be gathered from the same fact in our moral experience which constitutes and explains the former. But if, on the contrary, we perceive on reflection—what all mankind appear to presume antecedently to reflection—that our gratitude to a fellow-creature originates, strictly, in our persuasion of his benevolence towards us; that we approve it, specifically, as the growth of that

persuasion; and this whatever farther inducement may be superadded to its exercise; then we have surely the testimony of our reason to the primary assumption of Christianity, that the Creator requires us to cultivate the affection of gratitude towards himself. Indeed, if such be a correct account of our moral approbation of gratitude, how is it possible to evade the inference that it is due to the Donor of our life and faculties, of all our capacities and means of happiness?—whether Christianity in *other* respects be worthy of belief or not; or whatever be the evidence of any particular religion, that may claim to deliver his laws, and to enforce them on his own authority and sanctions. We need not argue the inference. If beneficence towards us on the part of a fellow-creature be, itself, the proper and sufficient reason for gratitude towards him, it were a preposterous notion that it ceases to be such as an attribute of our Maker, though the benefits which he confers upon us are perfectly gratuitous, as well as infinitely more abundant, than our fellow-creatures—themselves but instruments of his own beneficence—can bestow.

We must here then direct attention to a doctrine relating to virtue, or moral rectitude, which is not a little prevalent amongst us; inasmuch as it bears, in a remarkable manner, on the proposition under discussion. It is laid down and

confidently maintained by many, that that which constitutes actions virtuous, or entitles them to a moral approbation,—that for which they are considered *generally*, and made the subject of precepts enjoining the performance of them,—is their tendency to promote the common happiness, or their utility to mankind at large. This position, we must at once observe, is capitally defective, since it fails to specify the particular disposition by which a person is presumed to be actuated, in the performance of actions which conduce to the welfare of society, and are consequently denominated virtuous; whereas it is palpably the agent, and the agent only, who is properly the object of moral approbation, and this in virtue of the disposition which is presumed to determine his conduct. Accordingly amongst those who maintain the general utility of actions to be the standard of their moral rectitude, there is an important difference, or rather perfect contrariety, of opinion on this essential particular—the disposition of the agent. According to some, an individual, in order to entitle himself to a moral approbation, in performing an action designated virtuous on account of its general utility, must be actuated by a desire of that general happiness which he is instrumental to promote. These advocates of utility, then, as the standard of rectitude, account a man virtuous, or morally approvable, in the

degree in which he is influenced in his conduct by a benevolence which regards the welfare of the whole community.[1] Others, however, who contend for utility as the test of virtue, have embraced a theory on the moral principles which results in the conclusion, that individuals denominated virtuous are prompted to actions conducive to the common welfare, and therefore termed right, by their tendency to promote, in a variety of ways, their own gratification and advantage:—in other words, that the practice of virtue consists in performing actions useful to the community from a prevailing desire that those actions may be useful to ourselves.[2] We shall bring this theory under particular discussion in a future discourse; but it must be perceived that the difference of opinion just stated, among those who professedly espouse utility as the test of virtue, is of fundamental importance in the question of morals, and should be steadily kept in view in the prosecution of our subject.[3]

[1] For example, Dr. Dwight maintains that "virtue is founded on utility," but he supposes benevolence on the part of the agent. "Benevolence," he observes, "directs the whole active power or energy of the mind in which it exists to the production of the most extensive happiness. This is what I intend by the utility of virtue; and that in which, as it appears to me, all its excellence is found."—*System of Theology*, Ser. xcix.

[2] Mills's Analysis, Chap. xxiii.

[3] Most persons, we believe, who consider actions to be right on the ground of their utility or expediency, take for

It will suffice, however, to our present purpose to cite the position agreed upon by parties

granted the benevolence of the agent; and it is natural enough that they should do so; but they are not entitled to make this assumption in statements intended to be definitive or explanatory upon the subject. Dr. Dwight, we remark, considers the benevolence of the agent to be so obviously and properly implied in his position, that "virtue is founded in utility," that he speaks of any other supposition in terms of impatience and even disgust. "It has been objected to this doctrine," he observes, "that if virtue is founded in utility, *every thing* which is *useful* must *so far* be virtuous. This objection it is hardly necessary to answer. Voluntary usefulness is the only virtue. A smatterer in moral philosophy knows that understanding and will are necessary to the existence of virtue. He who informs us, that if virtue is founded in utility, animals, vegetables and minerals, the sun, the moon, and the stars, must be virtuous, so far as they are useful, is either disposed to trifle with mankind for his amusement, or supposes them to be triflers." It is no part of ours to vindicate that particular objection which provoked the indignation of this author; though, be it observed, it was alleged by one who was something above a smatterer in moral philosophy—Adam Smith, in his well-known observation—"It seems impossible we should have no other reason for praising a man than that for which we commend a chest of drawers." We may allow it to be taken for granted that understanding and will are necessary to the existence of virtue; but surely this is no reason for assuming that, in doing acts which are generally useful, the understanding and will are directed to the promotion of the general welfare; and that this is clearly implied in the position that virtue is founded in utility. There are ethical writers, alluded to above, who are perfectly agreed with Dwight that virtue is founded in utility, and also that understanding and will are essential to its existence; but who are directly at issue with him in the inference that *therefore* benevolence is the governing principle in the practice of virtue.

who differ so widely on the most essential conditions of a virtuous action—the position that

But even the system of Mandeville might have reminded him, that understanding and will are readily conceivable in the performance of actions useful to the community—that is, in the production of utility, without the exercise of that benevolence which seeks the promotion of "the most extensive happiness;" and in which, as he states, all the excellence of virtue is found.

That the motive of the agent determines the moral quality of his action is generally acknowledged, but this essential truth appears to be a little obscured by the use of a phrase which we may properly here take occasion to notice. When an act enjoined by a moral precept has been done, but not from a virtuous motive, it is customary to say that the action itself was *abstractedly* right. The phrase, we suspect, brings with it a vague notion of a certain rectitude in the individual who performed it; though if the opinion be correct as to the motive by which he was influenced, he has done an act which was certainly not a right one, and it may have been a foully wrong one. It should be considered then, as must be readily evident, that in speaking of an action as abstractedly right, we abstract the action only in its *outward* form or circumstances, and we term it right on the presumption that the outward or physical circumstances of the action are attended by a particular motive or disposition of the mind. If we say, It is abstractedly right to relieve the distressed, we presume the exercise of benevolence in doing so. Should we call it right on any other presumption? The abstraction is, of course, a purely intellectual operation; the action without an agent has no existence; and the merit or demerit of the agent lies in the motive by which he is influenced. Dr. Reid, indeed, in answer to the question, What do we mean by goodness in an action considered abstractedly?—replies—"To me it appears to lie in this, and this only, That it is an action which ought to be done by those who have the power and opportunity, and the capacity to perceive their obligation to do so." (Essay v.

actions are right or wrong, to be approved or disapproved, inasmuch as they are useful or pernicious to human society. This doctrine, we have said, bears in a remarkable manner on the principle of religion under discussion; for, if true, it follows that gratitude is a virtuous affection, or the object of an intelligent moral approbation, for this reason, and no other—that by prompting us to reciprocate the kindness, to return the benefits, which we receive, we encourage a spirit of mutual benevolence, or the performance of useful actions one towards another, and thereby augment the sum of human happiness. But if this be a correct explanation of the duty of gratitude from man to man, we must confess we are unable to perceive on what principle such a duty can be incumbent upon us in relation to the Creator: for, palpably, there is no possibility of returning, after this manner, the gifts which he has bestowed upon us. If we are bound to exercise gratitude to a fellow-creature who has succoured us in urgent need, or rescued us in imminent peril, or lavished his bounty upon us, solely because the world is

Ch. 4.) But this reply regards the action both in its outward circumstances and the motive from which it proceeds: an action that *ought* to be done is an action to be done from a virtuous motive. It gives no explanation of the phrase "abstractedly right" when applied to an action not done from a virtuous motive; an instance in which, as we have intimated, it may possibly affect the distinctness of our ideas of the nature of virtue.

benefited by a reciprocity of kindness and generosity, and there is nothing in that affection entitling it to a moral approbation apart from, prior to, and independent of, this consideration,—we cannot, from reflecting on the gratitude we feel, the debt we acknowledge, to a human benefactor, deduce an argument, or realize a motive, of a moral, obligatory nature, for gratitude to the Being who created and sustains us, and "whose tender mercies are over all his works." We cannot advance from the love we owe and cherish towards an earthly parent, to any more profound and ruling sentiment, of a kindred nature, towards our Heavenly Parent, the Father of spirits.

Our subject is the particular duty of gratitude to God; but that ethical philosophy we speak of, touching the reasons of our moral judgments, discloses no rational basis, that we can discern, for other affections to the Deity, which it might have seemed the office of gratitude to call into action, and to grow itself more ardent by enkindling. So far from bringing into view the duty of gratitude, or any other duty, to the Deity, it places us in such a position, that there is apparently nothing, in the approving and condemning judgments of the conscience, to suggest the existence of a moral relation to the Creator; and if suggested, nothing to confirm it; and that if we obtain any well-founded conviction of

his government over us, as voluntary agents, or our responsibility to him for our doings, we must obtain it by a direct revelation from himself. And it manifestly follows, that if we believe any particular documents, as the Scriptures, to compose a revelation from himself, we must arrive at this belief on evidence entirely exclusive of any proof or intimation of the duties which they inculcate, that may be gathered from our moral principles, or the working of the conscience. We know that the exercise and culture of right affections, as we term them, are essential to the welfare of human society; but in determining such affections to *be* right, to *be* morally approvable or obligatory in virtue of their utility to human beings, we have singled out a property in them for our moral esteem and admiration, which discovers them to be wholly inapplicable and nugatory as an offering to Almighty God; —a property, moreover, which affords no better ground for concluding that he requires us to cherish such affections towards our fellow-creatures, than that he demands them immediately for himself. It is true, the Creator manifestly designs the happiness of his creatures, but nothing is more evident from the general observation of his works, than that he accomplishes that design in ways without number, and to an unlimited extent, in a perfect independence of our volition, or intentional concurrence, in

promoting it. The simple fact, then, that certain actions are, on the whole, necessary or conducive to the happiness of mankind, can supply no argument for believing that he requires us to perform such actions, and to nourish the affections from which they spring, as a voluntary obedience to his will, and active subordination to his purpose.[1]

[1] In rejecting this argument, we may appear to be directly at issue with a writer so generally excellent, that we would not be thought to differ from him in any degree more than we strictly do. Paley observes:—"The method of coming at the will of God concerning any action by the light of nature, is to inquire into the tendency of the action to promote or diminish the general happiness. This rule proceeds upon the presumption, that God Almighty wills and wishes the happiness of his creatures; and, consequently, that those actions which promote that will and wish, must be agreeable to him; and the contrary."—*Moral Philosophy*, chap. iv. But it should be remembered that this author, as before remarked, premises the divine authority of the Scriptures; that is, he assumes, by obvious implication, the position which we are engaged to maintain—namely, that mankind stand in a moral relation to God, that they are bound to obey him. In the Scripture however, morality, as he states, is taught by general rules, the application of which, though illustrated by examples, is left, in a number of cases, for "moralists to determine." Hence he has recourse to "the light of nature," which instructs us, as he concludes, that the beneficial tendency of an action is a proof of its conformity to the will of God. He was, surely, too close an observer of nature, and too cautious a reasoner, to maintain, *à principio*, that the beneficial tendency of some actions, and the hurtful tendency of others, constitute a proof that it is our *duty to God* to do the former and to abstain from the latter.

We are far from imputing to any a willingness to banish religion from the world, simply because they consider the general utility of right actions to be the essence and measure of their moral rectitude, or the reason why they are judged to be right. Persons have held, and yet hold, opinions relating to morals at variance, as we apprehend, with the assumptions of Scripture, who, notwithstanding, revere these writings as an authoritative declaration of the will of God; and to such the want of a clear discernment of the connexion between morality and religion is effectually compensated by that assent which, as has been remarked, is instantly and everywhere given to the reasonableness of gratitude to God; or, generally, by the apparently self-evident existence and propriety of religious duties. But we are here supposing such duties to be brought into question, to be disputed or maintained, by individuals who have stepped aside from a natural and customary mode of thinking in reference to the Deity; and, we repeat, this inquiry is of primary importance in a deliberate and reflective estimate of the claims of Christianity; for it is our conviction of an intrinsic reasonableness in the practical principles which it teaches, that dictates a conscientious examination of the historical and documentary evidence of its truth; that commands attention to its distinguishing doctrines; and must mainly

uphold them in the belief of mankind at large.[1]

We do not allow that our approval of gratitude, with the actions that spring from it, is founded on a perception of its favourable consequences to the community. On the contrary, it will be

[1] The consequence which we have alleged, and would urge upon the attention, as issuing from the doctrine of utility in morals, has not been unperceived by religious men, who have intended by that doctrine to resolve all moral excellence into benevolence; though we can hardly suppose that it can have received very much of their attention. Dr. Dwight, for example, observes that "to glorify God, voluntarily, is exactly the same conduct towards him, which, when directed towards creatures, produces their happiness. It is, in truth, doing all that which it is in our power to do towards the happiness of the Creator." (Ser. xcix.) Maintaining, as this author did, that all rectitude consisted in benevolence, he was compelled, he was aware, to infer that if mankind were capable of rectitude to God, they must realize it in the exercise of that particular disposition towards him. This opinion as to the governing principle of the devout mind appears so forced and artificial, and such language as that which we read in the book of Job—"Can a man be profitable unto God, as he that is wise is profitable unto himself? Is it any pleasure to the Almighty that thou art righteous? or is it gain to him that thou makest thy ways perfect?"—such language as this appears so congruous to our reason, and is so akin to men's actual thoughts and feelings at the footstool of their Creator, that it may well excite surprise that religious men, theologians as well as others, should have selected, as the sole, all-comprehending principle of rectitude in the mind of man, one which, if regarded in their relation to the Deity, must have compelled them to accept such a description of piety as that which has just been cited from Dr. Dwight. The fact, indeed, admits of explanation; but it were inconvenient here to pursue the subject.

found that the doctrine adverted to, namely, that it is the general utility of actions which constitutes their moral rectitude, when applied to the elucidation of this particular virtue, is exceedingly hypothetical and wholly unsupported by the moral experience of mankind. Gratitude, it deserves to be considered, grows out of our persuasion of that goodness of which we have been the recipients; it is morally approved and demanded as the fruit of that persuasion; just as pity is awakened, and the mind arrested to the duty of active benevolence, by the aspect of suffering, or the knowledge of its existence. The happiness which so conspicuously flows to the whole community of mankind from acts of gratitude as well as of benevolence, we hold to be strictly the result of such a constitution of our nature, and illustrative of the mind of its Author.

But deferring this particular topic to the next discourse, it may be necessary, before we conclude for the present, to offer some remarks in vindication of that eminence and priority which we have assigned to the duty of gratitude, in our moral relation to the Deity. It may appear to some that we have fallen into an error in regarding our persuasion of the goodness of God as the basis of religious obligations; and that there is a justice in the demand of the Creator upon our obedience, which is strictly antecedent to and distinct from his title to our gratitude. But if

we consult that universal law of equity which is everywhere appealed to as prescribing the duties of mankind one to another,—and, be it remembered, it is our perception of a rectitude in our doings one to another which, in the judgment of Scripture, supports the sense of duty towards God,—we shall find that the claim which beneficence raises to the gratitude of its object, is strictly a claim of justice, and one of the highest degree; and that, in concluding otherwise, we are very much occupied with that partial and most limited idea of justice, which may be perceived to grow out of the constitution and arrangements of civil society; enabling it to exact from its members the fulfilment of a particular portion only of their duties, and these merely in their outward character, for its own preservation and advantage. In human governments, the power that compels obedience is the predominating attribute of the ruling head or body; while the particular duty of gratitude is almost, if not entirely, excluded. Hence a seeming insufficiency in the benevolence of the Supreme Being, or in his title to our gratitude, considered as the foundation of our duties towards him, or his *moral* supremacy over us. The universal law of equity, however, which prescribes to ourselves the same conduct towards others as it would prompt us to demand from others towards ourselves,—a law so early recog-

nised and understood in its primary dictates, and so naturally presumed and appealed to by all mankind in their transactions one with another, that they have commonly spoken of it as "originally inscribed" upon the hearts of men,—that law dictates the exercise of benevolence on the one hand, and establishes a right to gratitude on the other; and determines that the more spontaneous and disinterested the former, the more unjust and criminal the man who withholds the latter. We need but intimate that this is the weighed decision, as well as the unbidden judgment, of mankind in general; and that in no single instance are they more unanimous and determinate, than in commending a cordial, active acknowledgment of benefits, and branding the ungrateful with infamy. Moreover, it could readily be shown that in no instance is the sense of duty more evidently brought into conflict with the passions,—virtue, on numerous occasions, more severely tried, and urged to nobler feats and a purer heroism. It would consequently appear that the supreme and absolute claim of the Creator upon our devotion and obedience, in virtue of his goodness towards us, is strictly a claim of right and justice.[1]

[1] This view of the duty of gratitude is fully adopted by Dugald Stewart, in the following interesting observation on the feelings which naturally prompt us to discharge it—feelings, the reality and force of which, in the morally disciplined and habitually

Indeed, we apprehend that, if it be reasonable to entertain a sense of duty to God, the Christian religion has affirmed the specific ground on which it properly rests. In other words, if it be right and just in him to command, and consequently in ourselves to obey,—or if there be any significance in such terms as "right" and "just," which render them applicable to the conduct of God to his creatures, and the conduct of his creatures to God,—the rectitude, the justice is founded upon our assurance of his goodwill and

virtuous mind, cannot be doubted, notwithstanding the very frequent and gross neglect of that duty, so commonly observed, and adverted to in the former part of this discourse:—"In one remarkable instance, too, Nature has made an additional provision for keeping alive among men a sense of those obligations which justice imposes. That the good offices which we have received from others constitute a debt, which it is morally incumbent on us to discharge by all lawful means in our power, is acknowledged in the common forms of expression employed on such occasions, both by philosophers and the vulgar. As the obligations of gratitude, however, do not admit (like the rules of honesty, strictly so called) of support from the magistrate, Nature has judged it proper to enforce their observance by one of the most irresistible and delightful impulses of the human frame. According to this view of the subject, gratitude, considered as a moral duty, is a branch of justice, recommended to us, in a peculiar manner, by those pleasing emotions which accompany all the modes of benevolent affection." We cite the passage for its strong assertion of the *moral obligation* to gratitude, the imperative nature of which presses closely on the assumption of Christianity before us. Indeed, the highest estimation of gratitude as a duty is frequent among writers on morals. Cicero places it second to none:—"Nullum officium referendâ gratiâ magis necessarium est."

benevolence of purpose in our creation. For suppose that, instead of displaying himself as the Author of happiness to ourselves and innumerable creatures, he had evinced a prevailing disposition to distress and torment us; that we had before us a scheme of the universe manifestly adapted to produce a preponderance of misery in the world; or that we had ascertained, in whatever manner, his hostility or even indifference to our welfare; and suppose, notwithstanding, he had demanded our obedience and promulgated a law for our scrupulous observance;—could we, on this supposition, discern any principle of justice, any moral propriety, in such a demand? We apprehend, not. Even if his law, so far as it defined our duties towards our fellow-creatures, were perfectly equitable, could we hold it equitable in him to require the discharge of such duties as a course of obedience to himself? To fulfil our duty, to do what is right, toward our fellow-creatures, is one thing; to fulfil our duty to a fellow-creature in the discharge of our duty to God, is another. The Scripture assumes this distinction; it challenges the assent of our reason in enjoining the uniform practice of virtue on the special ground of a moral obligation to the Creator.[1]

[1] Here Cudworth's argument, against the notion that "mere will" in God or man can found a moral obligation to

We have put an hypothesis, which, it need hardly be observed, is purely imaginary, to illustrate, as is often necessary, the condition in which we actually exist. So far from being enclosed in the awful grasp of an infinite and arbitrary Power, and placed in a state of servile, revolting subjection to Him "in whom we live, and move, and have our being," there is an unspeakable contrast in our real experience with such an imagination of helplessness and terror:—a contrast so palpable and convincing that few, if any, of our sensitive and aspiring race have uttered a suspicion, or whispered a doubt, of the benevolence of God. The sufferings of our species may have limited or perplexed the idea of his power; but they have rarely, if ever, impaired the conviction of his goodness. The

the obedience of commands, may be not inapplicable. "It was never heard of, that any founded all his authority of commanding others and others' obligation or duty to obey his commands, in a law of his own making, that men should be required, obliged, or bound to obey him. . . . . The right or authority of the commander is founded in natural justice and equity, and an antecedent obligation to obedience in the subjects; which things are not made by laws, but presupposed before all laws to make them valid. . . . . If this were not morally good and just in its own nature, before any positive command of God, that *God should be obeyed by his creatures*, the bare will of God himself could not beget an obligation upon any to do what he willed and commanded, because the natures of things do not depend upon will, being not things that are arbitrarily made.—*Eternal and Immutable Morality*, Ch. 1.

inquiring mind has sought a solution of the numerous evils of our state in some quality of matter untractable to his purpose; or imputed them to some malignant being intent upon thwarting his beneficent designs, and embittering the springs of all human felicity. In our day, at least, the sun in the firmament is not more visible to the bodily eye, than the goodness of the Creator is manifest to the human understanding in the constitution of the world. The men who are searching into its structure and laws are continually discovering his wisdom and power in the works of beneficence; continually bringing to light some specific and heretofore unknown "contrivance" for our good; something made or adjusted to obviate a particular danger, to supply some want, to superadd some pleasure, to improve the well-being of his creatures;—a species of intelligence that, we may be sure, will never come to an end; a tale that will never be told, while any portion of the universe shall remain unexplored, and till man has run his career in knowledge.

Presuming, then, the truth of the prevailing apprehension as to the ground or reason for which gratitude itself is judged to be a duty, God's right by creation over us, regarded as a right founded in infinite beneficence, is perfectly answerable to our moral constitution, and directly adapted, we shall find, to bring its principles into

vigorous action and full development. We are so formed as to recognise in the affectionate care and liberality of any individual towards us, the preserver of our infancy, the guide of our youth, the friend and benefactor of our riper years, the man who has succoured us in need, danger, or perplexity, remitted or mitigated the debt we owed him,—who, in a word, has sought, in whatever manner, to promote our happiness, a claim upon our gratitude; and experience teaches us to estimate the depth and energy of this principle by the promptitude which it awakens, and the efforts which it calls forth, to fulfil the will of its object, and to demonstrate our sense of his benevolence in some appropriate manner in our conduct. Hence the dictate of a reasonable piety, of natural religion, to recognise such a claim on the part of the Creator, and to own it to be paramount and supreme. Such is the conclusion, such the principle of religion, which the Scripture everywhere implies and appeals to, in impressing on the conscientious observance of mankind those commands and prohibitions which it affirms to have been laid upon them by the Almighty:—declaring, as it does, his continual and unsparing goodness towards them, and urging it upon their habitual reflection; and recalling especial deliverances which he has accomplished for them, or signal and abundant blessings conferred and heaped

upon them; whensoever it addresses their sense of duty, expostulates with their waywardness, exhorts them to repentance, or vindicates the punishment which it denounces against the contumacious and persisting transgressor.[1]

[1] The view here taken of God's right of creation over us may possibly give rise to one or two objections, which we would add a few words to anticipate. The Scripture, as we have said, assumes, preeminently, the duty of gratitude to God, and, though it were unlike the manner of its authors to engage the attention of their readers on questions of an abstract nature, or remote from ordinary modes of thinking, it would be difficult, we apprehend, to make out any prior ground of religious obligation. The "right of creation," however, is not unfrequently alleged and treated of in such a manner as to convey the idea of its existence, separately considered, or irrespective of the communication of happiness to the creature. If such an idea be really entertained, we would not seem to be forward or concerned to dispute it. Indeed it is rather corroborative of our preceding strain of observation than otherwise. We must confess, indeed, that if such a right exists, we are incorrect in saying that the duty of obedience to God is *founded* in his goodness towards us; but there is another inference far more important;—in connexion with such a right, his claim to gratitude is rendered still more prominent and conspicuous; for if the act of creation itself founds a claim upon the obedience of the creature, how must such a claim be enhanced if that act be one of benevolence!—Farther, the claim of the Creator upon the gratitude of mankind may not appear readily applicable to those amongst them whose experience seems to be, principally, one of suffering and not of enjoyment. What are they to be grateful for, it is possible some may be disposed to ask, who lament their existence and feel its continuance a burden? We answer—we have presumed the most unhappy of our species to believe that the design of God in creating them was a benevolent one,

In concluding, we would intimate the great propriety of opposing this principle of duty to the Creator to a notion, which any may be apt to entertain, of a certain unreasonableness in religion, on the ground that our conceptions of his nature and attributes must be necessarily inadequate, and even mixed, we know not how far, with such as are actually erroneous. What can we properly know, some are wont to say, how can we rightly conceive of the divine nature?—as though the alliance between reason and religion were one which, however it may arrest the vulgar, or satisfy a superficial consideration, the philosopher must disdain to acknowledge. Now, it is readily admitted that when we speak of the attributes of the Supreme Being, we do not and cannot realize to our conceptions the import of the words we utter. There is nothing in the mind of man which can enable him fully to comprehend one of the perfections of God,—how powerless, then, to conceive the effect of their

whatever be the mode or conditions of its accomplishment:—a truth which they must find it hard to doubt, when, in seasons of reflection, they raise their thoughts to the Author of their being. What, however, is this but to acknowledge his claim upon their gratitude? But if there be an individual who disbelieves the goodness of the Creator in bringing him into existence, we must of necessity admit that we are pursuing an argument which to such an one, in the present state of his mind, is wholly inapplicable. We have premised a belief of the divine benevolence.

union and combination! It is perceived, in a moment, that there must be an inexpressible disparity, and, consequently, scope for speculative error, in our conceptions of the Deity: that there must be "deep things of God" upon which human reason can cast but a feeble light; its struggling torch rather making more palpable an impenetrable darkness that covers them. But when this sense of weakness and insufficiency in the human understanding, so proper to the spirit of piety, is applied to the disparagement of piety itself, we would urge the sceptic to reflect that religion, as taught in the Scriptures, consists in such a present and habitual persuasion of the goodness of God, as induces a supreme regard to the expressions of his will concerning us; that it makes no pretensions to a strictly intelligent apprehension of the infinite and perfect Spirit, or to correct deductions from his nature and attributes. Undoubtedly, it is an office of piety to acquire, so far as we are able, such ideas of God as may be most in harmony with his spirituality and perfections; but the purely speculative inaccuracy which an individual may admit into his conceptions relating to the Deity, can form no better objection to his religion, as a "reasonable service" to him, than would his ignorance of any one or all of the sciences. We might ask, indeed, whether, supposing we had acquired a greatly more enlarged, or even a perfectly true

conception of the Deity in his natural or physical attributes, in the infinity of his knowledge and power, in his self-existence and eternity—we might ask whether such a conception could affect us, in the smallest degree, as the subjects of moral ideas and affections; and not rather leave us utterly vacant of a sense of duty, or a notion of rectitude, towards God? But suffice it to say, when a certain class of philosophers shall have refuted the demonstrations of his goodness, and enveloped in darkness this attribute of his character;—when they shall have shown the impropriety, the unreasonableness of gratitude to the Supreme Being, and the inability of mankind to better their nature under its influence;—then we may venture to deride devotion as the offspring of ignorance, and contemn the principles inculcated in the Scriptures. Meanwhile, it appears highly conformable to our conception of the Deity, as the object of universal worship and obedience, that he should found a religion promotive of all the virtues, and the happiness which flows from them, on a principle which appeals alike and with equal efficacy to the understanding and affections of all mankind:—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind."

LECTURE III.

GRATITUDE AN ORIGINAL DUTY—THE APPEAL TO IT IN THE SCRIPTURE.

Matt. xxii. 37, 38.

THOU SHALT LOVE THE LORD THY GOD WITH ALL THY HEART, AND WITH ALL THY SOUL, AND WITH ALL THY MIND. THIS IS THE FIRST AND GREAT COMMANDMENT.

In the last discourse we adverted to an opinion not a little prevalent, that that which constitutes the virtue or moral rectitude of actions, is, their tendency to promote the happiness of the community, and insisted that it supplied no argument for the cultivation of a gratitude to the Creator, similar to that which we approve ourselves in entertaining towards a fellow-creature: for, if that opinion be correct, it must follow that gratitude is morally right inasmuch as, by a reciprocation of kind and generous offices, it materially improves the happiness of mankind: an argument entirely unavailing to ground the inference, or, rather, to verify the general and

most spontaneous conviction of mankind, that the beneficence of the Creator renders him a proper object of gratitude to his rational creatures. Moreover, it was observed, and may be safely repeated, that you cannot, with any propriety, conclude the human race to be under a moral obligation to the Deity, whether in the regulation of their affections towards himself or their fellow-creatures, from the fact that a particular government of the mind, a particular class of actions, is, on the whole, conducive to their happiness. There are innumerable instances in which the Creator has committed to our hands the custody and advancement of our own happiness, in which, however, we recognise no principle of religious duty. In truth, it were a strange conclusion that our species were guilty before God because they had failed, either collectively or individually, of that degree of happiness which he had capacitated them to attain; and that they were liable to punishment in a future state, by continuing to neglect the more enduring sources of enjoyment, intellectual and physical, in the present life.

But it will be found, we apprehend, that the assent immediately and, in the first instance, universally given to the duty of gratitude to God, is strictly agreeable to our reason, or confirmed by subsequent reflection; inasmuch as our gratitude to a human benefactor originates

in a persuasion of his goodness towards us, and is judged to be "right" as the effect, specifically, of that persuasion, independently of advantages unquestionably accruing to the community from its general exercise and culture; and that, consequently, our approval of gratitude to a human benefactor conveys a most intelligible indication of a similar duty to the Supreme Being, the Author of all good, and is directly confirmatory of that commandment which the Scripture declares to be the first and great commandment in his law.

Some, it is possible, may here be disposed to ask, What is the meaning of the term "right" as applied to gratitude, or any other virtuous affection, if it do not signify its general utility? But it should be borne in mind that it is not in the power of words, speaking strictly, to originate ideas, but merely to suggest them; and that we endeavour to do this by employing the language commonly used for that purpose. When, therefore, we say that gratitude is judged to be *right*, in distinction from being *generally useful*, we can add nothing essential in farther explanation of the former term. We can only exchange it for some synonymous term, or repeat that it does *not* mean, that is, it is *not* used to express, the general utility of actions; and if it be affirmed on the contrary, that this *is* its meaning, we answer the affirmer, You do not explain the meaning of the term "right," but you affirm, in effect, that the

mass of mankind, in using it to signify something in actions distinct from their general utility, have ascribed to them a property which in reality does not exist. And this is actually the opinion of a section of those who maintain the doctrine of "utility" in morals. It is evident from their writings that, in their view, the term "right," as applied to actions, signifies such as are generally useful, and are, for this reason, demanded or encouraged by society, and that the generality of mankind, in using that term as conveying a proper, distinctive meaning, or as otherwise than synonymous with "generally useful," believe the reality of a property in actions, that is, in the individuals performing them, which has no existence but in their own imagination :— a moral rectitude which, in truth, is nothing more than a conformity to rules of conduct instituted and upheld through the common sensibility to pain and pleasure, and the efforts of all mankind, as members of society, to escape the former, and to compass as much as may be practicable of the latter.[1]

[1] As an example of the manner in which the prevailing apprehension of virtue is often contested, we may quote a passage from the writings of an eminent advocate of the principle of utility in morals, Mr. Bentham. It may be proper, however, in the first place, to extract his definition of this principle. "A man," he observes, "may be said to be a partizan of the principle of utility, when the approbation or disapprobation he annexes to any action, or to any measure,

It is not, however, with these advocates of utility in morals that we propose at present to

is determined by and proportioned to the tendency which he conceives it to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the community; or, in other words, by its conformity or unconformity to the laws or dictates of utility." He then proceeds to observe—"Of an action that is conformable to the principle of utility, one may always say either that it is one that ought to be done, or, at least, that it is not one that ought not to be done. One may say also that it is right it should be done; at least, that it is not wrong it should be done; that it is a right action; at least, that it is not a wrong action. When thus interpreted, the words *ought*, and *right*, and *wrong*, and others of the same stamp, have a meaning; when otherwise, they have none." (*Morals and Legislation*, vol. i. p. 6.) Now, what is this but to assert, as remarked above, that that very large portion of mankind who use the words "ought," and "right," and "wrong," and "others of that stamp," to signify something else in actions than their general utility, assign to actions a property, recognised, as they believe, in moral rules enjoining or forbidding them, which, in the judgment of this author, and other "partizans of the principle of utility," has no existence in the nature of things? Instead of saying that the "term 'right' has no meaning but with reference to utility," (p. 12,) we apprehend, he would more clearly have explained his view by such a statement as this:—If human language, in relation to morals, had been founded on a correct apprehension of the nature of things, mankind would have used the term "right," if in that case they had used it at all, as strictly synonymous with "generally useful;" and we should no more have heard persons say that actions generally useful are right, than that actions generally useful are generally useful. Of course, if the rectitude of actions means, strictly and exclusively, their general utility, to say that actions generally useful are right is to speak mere tautology, to make no affirmation. In common usage, this is not the specific meaning of the term in question; and all

argue; and we refer to them solely for the purpose of separating them from the far larger

must submit to a limitation in the powers of language. "With regard to the notion or conception of duty," remarks Dr. Reid, "I take it to be too simple to admit of a logical definition. We can define it only by synonymous words or phrases, or by its properties and necessary concomitants, as when we say that it is what we ought to do, what is fair and honest, what is approvable, what every man professes to be the rule of his conduct, what all men praise, and what is in itself laudable, though no man should praise it."—*Essays*, vol. iii. ch. 8.

Having cited the conclusion of Mr. Bentham on the moral judgments, we shall venture to remark, that he has not treated this particular subject in a manner worthy of his own reputation, and answerable to the claims of philosophy. That mankind are naturally led to form the notion and belief of a rectitude in actions themselves, apart from their utility, other eminent Utilitarians have expressly admitted; and they have applied their knowledge of the mental operations to account for the rise and establishment of such a notion in the mind. But this author, though he endeavours to disprove the *reality* of such a rectitude, by a series of arguments and interrogations which he evidently intended should exhaust the question, has taken no notice, that we observe, of a natural and adhesive *notion* of its existence. He casts no light on this singular spontaneous generation of error; but deals with it as though it were one of the most ordinary forms of popular ignorance and misapprehension; or, rather, as though he were remonstrating with a capricious and dictatorial spirit in morals; or seeking to put down an obstinate prejudice in some, and a stupid fanaticism in others. This remarkable omission in so acute and studious a thinker is, indeed, partly explained, though not excused, in the following observation of Sir J. Mackintosh with reference to this author, and the ethical opinions maintained in his writings:—"Injury on this, as on other occasions, has been suffered by ethics from its ose affinity to jurisprudence. The true and eminent merit

number who ostensibly subscribe to that principle, but who, as was remarked in the last

of Mr. Bentham is that of a reformer of jurisprudence. He is only a moralist with a view of being a jurist. . . . Both he and his followers have treated ethics too juridically." (p. 306.) Whether Mr. Bentham be entitled to this high praise as a reformer of jurisprudence, is a question with which we have here no concern; but that his opinions on the principles of morals were very much subservient to his views on that subject, must be evident to most readers of his writings. We must add however, it is no less evident that he was urged, in his opposition to the notion of "rectitude" in question, by his aversion to the religion, as well as the jurisprudence, with which it was connected. But for this association, he could hardly have made so much allusion to "monks" and "religionists," in disputing a notion which, if erroneous, had misled most who had preceded him in the same path of inquiry, in ancient as well as in modern times; escaping detection from minds as acute and independent as his own. The Ethics of Aristotle evince a considerable observation of the utility of virtuous actions; but he was manifestly far from the discovery that this was the quality, and this only, that made them virtuous. It is true, the notion Mr. Bentham opposed enters into a close alliance with the principles of religion; and is more efficacious in promoting the belief of Christianity than even the details of its history, or the genuineness of its documents; but we need hardly say, it was not the growth of Christian opinions. It filled the mind of Plato, as well as of Cudworth and Hutcheson: and if it fostered the asceticism of the middle ages, it had previously produced the enthusiasm of the Stoics. Moreover, this is the very notion of moral rectitude which still continues to be current in the world, and is no more rejected in the schools of philosophy than it is doubted by the multitude of mankind. Whether, then, it was the object of Mr. Bentham to apply his ethics to the discredit of a particular religion or jurisprudence, it was a poor method of refuting a notion such as this, to endeavour to

discourse, in judging an action to be right because conducive to the common welfare, presume the agent to be actuated by a desire of that happiness to the community which he is instrumental to promote. These, in consistency, would not allow the term "right" to convey no meaning but with reference to the general utility of actions, for they apply it to the *disposition* of benevolence, as it contemplates the welfare of the

demonstrate its folly and absurdity: his business was to resolve it into its elements, and account for its existence. From the men whose scope it is to correct or demolish notions of *this* description, we look for a severe induction of facts, and an unusual insight into the operations of our mind: we expect them to adhere to the method of Bacon, as well as to emulate the subtilty of Berkeley. They may deal with our errors as they will, be as hard and sarcastic as they please; only let them give us to see that they are errors, by the light which they pour upon the constitution of our nature. It is common to place the name of Mill by the side of Bentham; and Sir J. Mackintosh appears to class them together. To our judgment, in the treatment of this subject there is no equality, if comparison, between them. Mr. Mill describes the notion of "praiseworthiness" in actions themselves as a "remarkable phenomenon of our nature" (which, upon the presumption that no praiseworthiness exists, it unquestionably is), and he assigns a particular process in the operations of the mind to account for its formation; and though we may consider his explanation to be materially defective, he aids our inquiry, and not a little, into the whole merits of the question. On the other hand, as Mr. Bentham does not apprize us of this "remarkable phenomenon of our nature," but leaves us, as much as ever, subject to its delusive influence, he seems to be taxing us with an error which it is not in our power to avoid—which he offers us no means of escaping.

whole community; whereas actions promotive of the common good, and therefore generalized as right or virtuous, may be performed in the absence of that disposition, and under the influence of motives, which *these* advocates of the principle of expediency would not confound with the spirit of benevolence.[1] When, for example, they contemplate an individual as a philanthropist, and assign him a pre-eminence in virtue, they are not only apprized of the fact, that he expends his property, or his time and faculties, in a manner calculated to promote the welfare of his fellow-creatures, but they believe him to be actuated by a predominating desire of allaying their sufferings, and improving their condition; and, in the strength of this master-principle, to hold in subjection those desires and propensities of our nature which they distinguish as "selfish," deriving a higher satisfaction from his own approval of this principle of his conduct, than the utmost gratification of such desires could afford him. And when, again, these advocates of expediency, as the test of virtue, adjudge a high commendation to an individual who, with the utmost difficulty, in severe toil and privation, has fulfilled a contract which had been wholly

If, as Mr. Bentham says, "the term 'right' has no meaning but with reference to utility," it cannot have a meaning with reference to benevolence, unless when benevolence and utility are predicated of a moral agent, they are only different words for the same thing.

forgotten by the only party who could have claimed its fulfilment, or which might have been easily evaded, without damage to his reputation, they refer his conduct to a similar prevailing regard to the common security and welfare, which, they presume, he has considered, and is well persuaded, must be essentially dependent on a general unflinching adherence to the received rules of morality. Now, it is to those who support the principle of utility in morals with this most important qualification,—to those who demand, in a morally approvable or praiseworthy action, the exercise of a comprehensive benevolence, that we would offer a few observations on the virtue of gratitude, with a special exclusive reference to the assumption of the Scripture under consideration—that our approving judgment of gratitude to a fellow-creature is so founded, or caused, as to evince the reasonableness of acknowledging a moral obligation to the Supreme Being; and, of course, to furnish proof of its existence.

We submit, then, that there is no proper foundation in our moral constitution—by which we mean, in the results of our own experience and consciousness as moral agents—for resolving the rectitude or duty of gratitude into that of a general benevolence. For, assuredly, if there be any ground for concluding a man to be virtuous on account of his benevolence,—whether

its objects be few or many,—considered as an affection of the mind, there is equal and precisely the same ground for concluding a man to be virtuous on account of his gratitude, as an affection of the mind. It is an arbitrary dealing with our moral judgments, as they form and establish themselves in the understanding, to merge our approbation of gratitude into that of benevolence. Gratitude springing, as it does, from a sense of the goodness of a fellow-creature, and expressing itself in conduct judged to be agreeable to his will, entitles the subject of it to a moral approbation no less distinctly and independently than benevolence, which itself is enkindled by the want and suffering of another, and displays its activity in exertions to relieve them. It is certain that mankind approve themselves in the exercise of gratitude as early, at least, as in acts of benevolence, and very much earlier than in the exercise of that benevolence which consults for the happiness of the whole community. The duty of obedience to parents is manifestly founded on their claim to the gratitude of their children, and it is as a parent, especially, that the Almighty is represented in the Scriptures as requiring our observance of his precepts; and though he is there exhibited as a ruler also, it is as one whose title to obedience is equally founded on his beneficence; who contemplates the well-being of his subjects, and

sways a sceptre of righteousness and mercy. It is almost too obvious for remark, that it is strictly under a lively persuasion of the kindness and affection of his parent towards him, that a child judges his conduct to be right, and is at peace and harmony with himself, in a course of true filial obedience. But also in riper years, and to the end of life, it can admit of no question, if we reflect on the experience of our own minds, that we recognise a claim upon our gratitude in the spirit of kindness and generosity displayed towards ourselves, independently of any consideration or inquiry, as to what would be the condition of society if that affection were extirpated, or its impulses habitually suppressed.

It is true, we readily discover that this, as well as every other virtue, is an important element of the common happiness, and accordingly incumbent upon us in relation to the community of which we are members. But is it reasonable, we ask, that this superadded obligation to gratitude should be allowed to displace and set aside an antecedent sense of duty; with the question, moreover, before us, whether our moral constitution supplies any proof or confirmation of religious duties? It was in virtue of that constitution, that we approved ourselves in the exercise of gratitude at as early a period as we had any consciousness of self-approbation whatsoever; and it was in virtue of the same constitu-

tion, that we afterwards approved ourselves in the exercise of benevolence. Can any cogent reason be assigned why the former should cease to be regarded as intrinsically virtuous, or a duty in itself and independently, as before? We are not, it must be remembered, contending with those who estimate benevolence merely as a source of advantage to the community, and consider it, under this description and no other, to be fitly an object of universal regard and encouragement; but with those who approve and praise it for itself; who contemplate it as an attribute of moral excellence in the mind which it purifies and adorns. Clearly, then, it was not their observation of human conduct as advantageous to the community, which elicited their high approbation of benevolence, but their reflection on the nature of a particular disposition which bears this name; not their acquaintance with the general tendency of actions, but their knowledge of the operations of the human mind. To perceive a certain disposition to be useful to society, by inciting individuals to actions which are so, is *one* thing; to perceive that disposition to be right, or morally approvable, in an individual, is *another;* the moralists whom we are now addressing perceive the disposition of benevolence to be *both.* We repeat, therefore, that to hold gratitude to be entitled to a moral approbation purely as a modification of benevolence,

is an arbitrary dealing with our moral judgments. It is not to interpret them simply and strictly by their own language, so to speak; but it is to place such a construction upon them as may accord with our own pre-conception of their meaning: in other words, it is not to explain our constitution as moral agents by our own experience of its principles; but it is to assume a theory upon ethics, and to explain our moral experience accordingly;—an error in our philosophy of no little moment, when the question we propose to determine is, What is the teaching or purport of our moral constitution as the work of God?—is it adapted to corroborate or disprove the duties of religion as inculcated in the Scriptures?

It may be asked, indeed, Does not the Deity design the happiness of his creatures? and do we not directly promote their happiness by teaching them to test their conduct by a principle of general benevolence? That the Creator designs the happiness of his creatures we have abundant proof; the world we have presumed to be sufficiently convinced on that head. The question on which it seems possible to doubt—the question, at least, which suggests any matter of practical concernment with reference to the Deity, is this: What is the nature, or what are the sources, of that happiness which he has capacitated mankind to attain? Does the happi-

ness which God designs for us, and is willing to bestow, include in its nature the exercise of any affections towards himself which we judge to be right towards our fellow-creatures? You answer the question by resolving all rectitude of heart and conduct, in man to man, into the exercise of benevolence. But we cannot extend our benevolence to God; our gratitude we can; this affection we can fix upon him to the utmost, and for ever. By comprehending all rectitude towards our fellow-creatures in benevolence, you throw no light on our capacity for rectitude towards God, or, rather, involve it in obscurity; as though in every instance that we own an obligation to be laid upon us by acts of kindness and liberality, yield our hearts to an emotion of gratitude, or expect some expression of it from another, we were not clearly instructed in the elements of our duty to the Creator, and were supplied with no proof of the reasonableness of the first and great commandment attributed to him in the Scripture.

We have insisted that no virtuous affection obtains our moral approbation, in its simple, elementary form, at an earlier period of life than gratitude: it might be added, that there is no upright affection of which we may affirm, with greater certainty, that it commands the moral approbation of all mankind.—But it would not consist with our general object in these dis-

courses to dwell longer on this particular topic; nor would we forget that, in maintaining a primary intrinsic obligation to gratitude, in opposition to the opinion that all human virtues are but diversified forms of benevolence, we are disputing a theory, relating to morals, adopted by many Christians themselves, rather than vindicating the assumptions of Christianity against its opponents. Indeed, this theory is far from necessarily inferring, on the part of its advocates, an insensibility to the duties of religion: it has, on the contrary, been maintained by certain theologians, who supposed that, by fixing the moral contemplation of Christians on the perfect benevolence of God, exclusively of any personal interest in its manifestations, or of any benefits which they had received or could expect at his hands, they should purify and exalt the spirit of religion; and, in this belief, they have strained their conceptions so far as even to assert, that the faithful Christian would continue to love God in a state of final exclusion from his favour, and absolute hopelessness of his mercy. At the same time, nothing, we may be sure, can be gained to the cause of religion, to the spirit of devotion or to practical piety, by a theory of moral rectitude which fails to produce the link of connexion between religion and morality, between our duty to God and our duty to man, which is at once brought into view, and pressed

upon the conscience by our moral approbation of gratitude, as that approbation is commonly explained, or supposed to be founded: a theory, therefore, which exhibits no *proof* that the exercise of benevolence, or the practice of virtue in general, is required by the Creator as "a reasonable service" to himself. We shall now consider a more general and strictly sceptical objection to the reasonableness of Christianity, regarded as an appeal from the Creator to the gratitude of mankind.

It was intimated in the last discourse, with reference to those who dispute the divine authority of the Scriptures, that they would hardly deny, and appear for the most part to admit, the claim of the Deity to the gratitude of his intelligent creatures; but that they look upon the Scriptures as supplying no valid or pertinent ground on which such a claim could be established; and, on the contrary, as ascribing to the Creator a character and procedure towards our species, repugnant to those ideas of his goodness which flow into the mind from the study and contemplation of his works. In denying the goodness of God as he appears in the Scriptures, it is evident, they virtually affirm, in some form of statement or other, that they do not recognise the benevolent Creator of the world in the record and declarations concerning him in those writings.

It is impossible, in these limits, to offer a particular reply to this objection, or to attempt a formal vindication of the credibility of the Christian religion, as an appeal from the Creator to the gratitude of mankind. But it is essential to observe, that we are wholly unprepared for a reasonable estimation of Christianity in this point of view, until we have made the acknowledged duty of gratitude to God, itself, the subject of especial consideration; until we have weighed it in the fulness of its moral import, and traced it to its proper consequences. It is observable, however, that persons who reject Christianity, or lean to scepticism on the question of its truth, are but little disposed to this exercise of their reason. They appear, for the most part, to be actually unconcerned to comprehend the measure of their duty to the Creator, and to ascertain, by the light of nature, the path of rectitude before him. In conceiving and entertaining objections to Christianity, they appear to contract an indifference to religion, as a practical principle, altogether; contenting themselves with merely speculative views of the beneficence of the Supreme Being, or verbal expressions of thankfulness towards him. Hence, as we have said, they are proportionably disqualified for a just appreciation of Christianity as an institution of divine benevolence; and, consequently, as a credible exposition of the moral government

of God. To make this evident, let us anticipate, in a measure, the *second* of the two cardinal propositions which it was principally proposed to establish; one, it would seem, that requires rather to be weighed than proved; namely, that the duty of gratitude to God binds us to the practice of virtue generally, as an exemplification of obedience to himself. Let us suppose this proposition to be granted. It follows,—and the inference is not only acknowledged in the religious confession of mankind in general, but must be assented to by all who attach any meaning to the proposition just stated,—that we have failed of the obedience due to him; that we have committed innumerable offences, either wilfully or through inadvertence, against him; that we stand convicted of *ingratitude* to the Author of all the good which we have received or can hope for;—the essence and height of injustice, as the accusing conscience has ever testified to the awakened and fearful transgressor. We ask, then, with what reason can the impugners of Christianity appeal to the goodness displayed in the structure of the universe, with a view to expose the inconsistency of this religion with the benevolence of the Creator? For if we are bound to obey God in virtue of his goodness, is it not certain that as we accumulate the proofs, and enlarge our conceptions, of that attribute of his nature, we do but collect the evidence of our

guilt,—we do but aggravate the charge of ingratitude against ourselves, in revolting from his benignant sceptre, departing from the commandment which, we perceive, he has laid upon us, and allowing the heart to grow estranged from the Author of all good, the rightful Proprietor of our affections, and, therefore, of all our faculties and powers? There is, doubtless, a consistency in this objection to the Scripture, when alleged by persons who deny the fact of their responsibility to the Creator, and consequently disclaim the imputation of ingratitude towards him, or of any demerit whatsoever in his view; resisting the reproaches of their conscience, by referring their conduct in general to the necessary, inevitable operation of principles inherent in their nature. This, however, is a particular ground of opposition to the Christian religion, or rather to the reasonableness of religious duties altogether, on which it was not our intention to enter; though, in alluding to it, we shall take occasion to remark, that the man who disowns the guilt of ingratitude against God, on the plea of a necessity to which he is subject in his volitions, must, to be consistent, deny the justice of a similar imputation when brought by one human being against another. He must deny the justice of that reproach and abhorrence which stigmatize and punish the ingratitude of man to man: he must deny the justice of all such feelings,

whatever be the acts that provoke them. That class of persons who are labouring to disprove the reality, and, if possible, to abolish the idea, of accountableness to the Creator, are perfectly consistent in affirming the unreasonableness of blaming and punishing a fellow-creature, for the perpetration of any crime, the commission of any deed, whatsoever; at least, under any other impression than that with which you would endeavour to secure yourself from the attack of brute natures, or to subdue and train them to your will and purpose.[1]

[1] It should be remembered, however, that many, indeed most, who maintain the doctrine of a moral necessity, so called, are not on this account the less convinced of their accountableness to the Deity. Now these opinions are often judged to be incongruous; and that they have a considerable *appearance* of being so is allowed by all. They who hold them both then,—and multitudes do hold and have held them both,—make it evident, at least, that their belief of a merit and demerit attaching to us as moral agents, and rendering us fit objects of reward and punishment, is, in their minds, too deeply fixed to be easily removed or unsettled. Indeed, unless those convictions of personal guilt and innocence to which mankind are subject, can be proved to be fallacious from the very mode in which they enter and prevail upon the mind; unless they can be distinctly classed with illusions of the human understanding known to be such; it must be awfully unsafe to an individual to disregard them in his relation to the Deity, on the presumption that he is ruled by a necessity in his doings, or has no freedom in his volitions;—a presumption, moreover, which, most likely, is wholly powerless and without effect on his conduct in general;—a presumption, too, grounded on reasoning which he not only knows to be as unsatisfactory to some as it appears to be pertinent and conclusive to others, but which

But we are here presuming the opponent of Christianity to disapprove and condemn ingratitude in his conduct towards God, as he disapproves and condemns it in his conduct towards his fellow-creatures; and we ask again, with what reason can he allege the goodness of the Creator, the proofs and expressions of it in all his works, as an objection to the credibility of the Scriptures? For what are these proofs of the Creator's goodness, but so many grounds of accusation against us as transgressors of his laws; so many reasons of compunction and dread of retribution; compelling us in truth and sincerity to acknowledge that, were he to withhold his goodness for the future, and exclude us from his favour and protection, we could not accuse him of injustice? This is not, we are

(and this is a far more important consideration) it is probable he may not himself clearly perceive to be sufficient to establish the presumption in question; in which case he has *manifestly* nothing to rely upon, as a reason and vindication for adopting it, but his *will* to get rid of an obligation that is pressing upon him; and that obligation—to Whom? And, be it yet added, while *he* is pleading a law or laws of necessity, with a view to justify his conduct, or rather to expose the unreasonableness of calling upon him to justify it, and to raise surprise that any such notion as that of an excuse or justification for human actions (at least before God) ever entered the human mind;—while, we say, he is thus pleading a law of necessity, the greater number of those who have traced that law most closely, and believe it most firmly, would be shocked to allege it in excuse for a single act that affects them with compunction, and which they judge to be wrong.

aware, the conclusion to which the illustrations of divine beneficence, that we are busied in collecting, most commonly or readily conducts us: it is not in general our mood to give a prompt and close attention to any title which another, be he God or man, may prefer to our regard and service, still less to any reasons for rebuke and accusation with which he may confront us. It is a conclusion, notwithstanding, which the Scripture most justly presses upon our reflections; preparing us, as it does, for a far better judgment on its pretensions to reveal the character and agency of the Deity, than can be gathered by regarding the works of his power, or the ordinations of his providence, as though we were only the recipients of pleasure and pain at his hands; or as though our debt of gratitude to him were entirely discharged by descanting on the general and wondrous adaptation of all things to the promotion of our happiness, and by the experience of feelings, be they what they may, which find no place among our principles of action, and take no effect in the reformation and improvement of our moral character.

We are far from maintaining that because the whole creation, while it demonstrates the goodness of its Author, bears testimony to the disobedience of mankind, we can discern no reasonable ground for the hope of his forgiveness, and, consequently, no encouragement to the

amendment of our conduct from the constitution of our own nature, or irrespectively of a divine revelation. But, however this be, the reflection of a moment would convince us, that there can be no example of his benevolence so signal and decisive in its character, as a readiness to extend his mercy towards us and cancel our offences. Regarding ourselves as actually guilty before him, and to such an extent as we are wont to acknowledge—in other words, liable, as we are, to remorse and the dread of punishment, in our subjection to a Being whose claims upon us we own to be absolute, and to whose power we can conceive no limits, we must, of necessity, conclude that, of all the manifestations of his goodness, that which is at once the highest proof of it, in itself considered, and most essential to our well-being, inexpressibly and above all comparison, is, that he should, in whatever manner, forego his accusation against us; and instead of leaving us to the apparently natural consequences of our doings, so deal with our iniquities as that the sense of our own unworthiness should only tend to enhance our conceptions of his goodness; should kindle anew every devout affection, and swell the song of adoration and joy. Whether this consideration, that a disposition to forgive the transgressor is paramount in our idea of divine goodness, (as it must be if we sustain a moral relation to the Deity,) be unfavourable to

the credibility of the Christian religion, we shall leave the objector to determine.

Christianity, it is true, delivers an account of the fallen, corrupt condition of human nature, which it may try and exceed our faculties to reconcile with the divine benevolence; casting some cloud upon the lustre of that goodness which it attributes to the Almighty in the forgiveness of our sins. But we are not warranted, on this account, to rest in superficial objections to the Christian religion: we are bound to consider its conformity to admitted facts and unquestionable inferences; —a conformity which infers an imperative obligation to inquire into its farther and special import, and the evidences in general of its divine original.

We are unwilling, however, to dismiss this imputation on the Christian religion as an appeal to the gratitude of mankind, without suggesting the great propriety of applying to the agency of God, as set forth in the Scriptures and relating to our spiritual condition, the same method of reasoning as is commonly assented to in reference to the constitution of our physical frame, and the ordinary procedure of Divine Providence. It merits observation that, notwithstanding all who acknowledge a responsibility to the Deity confess, at the same time, their actual demerit before him, there is scarcely an argument alleged to obviate apparent objections to his

goodness in the general constitution of our nature, that would not apply to our spiritual condition as described in the Scriptures; that is, so far as the physical and the moral world would admit of such a parallel or comparison. There is, indeed, one essential consideration relating to the former, which would be wholly irrelevant to the latter. Innumerable are the ills which beset our natural life; but we commonly admit and maintain that the constitution of the world, as a whole, bespeaks the benevolence of its Author; we insist on a clear preponderance of happiness in the collective experience of mankind. This is reasoning which we cannot apply to that description which the Scripture has given us of our condition as moral agents; not because it may be alleged that, if we estimate the human character on Christian principles, piety and virtue are not so prevalent among mankind as their opposites, and, consequently, if Christianity be true, there is less ground for hope than fear in the issues of futurity; not on this account—though indeed the lofty and triumphant language in which the Scripture predicts the future extension of the Messiah's kingdom, and the countless myriads of his obedient subjects, might convey a very different impression of the ultimate efficacy of the Gospel; but because in demanding an actual prevalency of Christian character and well founded hopes of immortality, as an evidence of

the divine benevolence, we should merge the essential distinction between natural and moral evil; we should overlook the nature of a responsible agent, and the conditions of a probationary state, and instead of regarding the Deity as the mercifully righteous Judge of the world, contemplate him as the absolute disposer of our destiny. Passing, therefore, for an adequate reason, one general topic of argument in maintaining the goodness of God in the creation, we may find others more applicable to the credibility of the Scriptures, in the light of an appeal to our gratitude as his accountable creatures. For example, our physical frame is subject to numerous painful and debilitating maladies; but, in arguing the benevolence of the Creator, it is commonly urged that all the contrivances in the human frame are directed to a beneficent purpose; that "though evil exists, it is never the object of the contrivance." Now, should we not apply this equitable principle in deducing the character of the Creator from the works of nature, to the moral condition of mankind as described in the Scriptures, with a view to judge rightly of the Christian religion? This system, it is true, exhibits our moral constitution as the seat of infirmity and disease, and requiring peculiar remedies and habitual care to preserve it in health and vigour—in remarkable consistency, be it never forgotten, with the results of human experience,—but,

at the same time, it declares that the end for which God originally created mankind, and which he *still* contemplates, is, that they may be conducted by the path of rectitude to a complete and enduring felicity. If, then, to reconcile the existence of physical evil with the goodness of God, we are satisfied with the reflection that the diseases of the body are incidental to its structure, and not the purpose for which it was created, would it be just and consistent to impute distemper and infirmity in our *moral* functions to a defect in his benevolence?—as if moral evil and its consequences had been an *object* in our *creation*—as if our passions had been implanted in us for the purpose of causing us to do wrong, and transgress the commandment given to us? Could we make this inference from the tendency and manifest office of our reason to restrain and control our passions; from the dictates and remonstrances of conscience; the compunction of guilt; the inward peace and open confidence of virtue? Is Christianity, then, to be judged unworthy of credence, because it so represents the actual condition of human nature—because it imputes corruption and degeneracy to our moral nature? As to the particular *history* of our species, with which the corruption of our moral nature stands connected in the Scriptures, we are not in a condition to form a right judgment of its credibility, till the

account of human redemption by Jesus Christ, which is also delivered in the Scriptures, has been made a subject of regard and contemplation, and likewise the external evidence of the truth of Christianity has been sifted and examined; when we may become convinced of the *reality* of facts asserted in the Scriptures, which, however, we may not be able to explain, in such a manner as to harmonize with the separate and independent deductions of our reason. What we are here submitting is, that inasmuch as a tendency to evil, or a seed of disorder and suffering inherent in our physical frame, is regarded as consistent with the goodness of the Creator, notwithstanding the presumption—in itself surely not unreasonable—that the Power which produced the universe could have shut out pain and anguish from the experience of our natural life, it cannot be an equitable conclusion, that an innate tendency to evil in our constitution as moral agents, must be incompatible with a benevolence of design on the part of the Creator. In other words, there is the same reason to qualify our idea of the unlimited power of God, or to subordinate it to the belief of his goodness, in reference to the moral, as to the physical, constitution of his creatures.[1]

[1] We have quoted an equitable position, that it is the main purpose of a work which bespeaks the disposition of its author, and we have regarded it in its usual application to the consti-

Again, it is the effect of Christianity to beget a concern and solicitude as to our condition in a future state; but—besides the reflection which must here suggest itself, that a dread of retribution hereafter has at all times disquieted the mind of man, and is the natural concomitant of guilt and all iniquity—that concern is declaredly intended for our enduring welfare, and manifestly calculated to promote it. Let it be considered, that as bodily pain is considerably palliated to our experience, and even commended to our judgment, as a means of self-preservation, so the idea and apprehension of future suffering associated with the belief of Christianity should be estimated on a similar principle. Surely, if it be a correct philosophy to regard as good those painful sensations of the body which are subser-

tution of our nature. For our part, however, if it be concluded that mankind are subject to the authority of God, as moral agents, then, considering that the goodness of God is abundantly proved by the general tendency of his works to the production of happiness, we hold it to be a deduction of reason—with the human character before us, as known by experience irrespective of the declarations of Scripture—that a *mixture* of suffering is actually a proof of the favourable purpose of God towards us as accountable beings. But, unquestionably, it would be instrumental to the accomplishment of such a design as the Christian religion repeatedly ascribes to him; namely, the correction of our disordered passions, our advancement in moral excellence, and the ultimate perfection of our enduring nature.—*Sermons by the Author*, (Serm. VIII. *Suffering, a Proof of Divine Goodness.*

vient to its preservation,—for instance, the smart and agony of fire which causes us to recoil from an element destructive of its organization and vitality,—it cannot be reasonable to regard as evil that feeling of insecurity and danger which the Scripture aims to awaken, for the very purpose of deterring us from vice and irreligion, and fixing our resolution in the fulfilment of our duties; if the nature of sin be such as is described in the Scripture, and is not a little evident to our own reason; if it be inimical to our wellbeing here and hereafter, and destructive of our best capacities and powers; if it mar the structure, and consume the happiness, of the immortal mind.[1]

And once more—with whatever clearness and profusion we gather the proofs of divine goodness from the works of nature, yet if our inquiries stop at the visible universe, or are limited to the experience of the present life, we *may* forego a

[1] It can hardly be denied, however, that persons inclined to scepticism often express themselves on this subject, as if the announcement and representations of future punishment in the Scripture were not denunciatory and preventive, not intended to preserve us from suffering in a future state, and obviously fitted to do so; but strictly predictive descriptions of misery to be personally and of necessity, realized. And they thus deal with the subject without having previously argued, or apprized us of their belief, that there is and can be no punishment in another state of being; none to be averted; none which a rational person need concern himself to escape.

manifestation of the regard and beneficence of the Creator, in comparison with which the brightest and most extended demonstration of his bounty from the frame of external nature, and the manifold blessings of this life, may, after all, be of small account, and actually insignificant; be scarcely more than a dim reflection—a diminutive shadow—the mimic rainbow that glistens in the spray of tumultuous waters, when compared to the glorious arch that spans the sky. Philosophers, and even divines, have often seemed to regard the life "that now is" as the index and measure of God's munificence. But in what manner is it spoken of in the Scripture, when assuming to lay open the treasures of divine goodness? As "a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." As such, indeed, we ourselves describe it in seasons of reflection. And why does it so often, if not in general, appear to be otherwise, attracting and absorbing our minds as though it were substantial and enduring? Partly, it may be, from an illusion of the imagination, in which we seem, in a manner, to extend our being to the life of the human race itself throughout its successive generations, rather than to fix our attention upon our own individual existence. The brevity and worthlessness of our own life are merged in our conception of the extent and duration of our species. Reviewing the history and contemplating the

prospects of mankind, their progression in knowledge and the arts, their growing power and dominion over nature,—expatiating over the past and the future, we forget that tale which is told so soon, those days which are so quickly numbered,—a boundless ocean of being fills and expands our thoughts, and who can realize that his own existence is but a bubble that sparkles for an instant on its surface! But it *may* be, as we have said, that this life is valuable and great only as a preparation for a life to come; that its most vivid and attractive forms of happiness are but types and images of things which "eye hath not seen nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive," but "which God" *may* have "prepared for those that love him." There is one only record that can assure us of so sublime and animating a reality,—one only which we allow to be worthy of any serious consideration and inquiry,—that which declares that Jesus Christ was "delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification;" exhibiting, in his own person, the pledge and "first fruits" of a general resurrection from the grave. But this record, in claiming our belief, is not offered to the indolent wishes, or the presumptuous hopes, of man. It addresses itself to our moral convictions and feelings. It looks to be understood, and appreciated, and firmly believed under the sense of our duty to God, and in a readiness to

obey his will. These we must preserve and actively cherish, if we would certainly do justice to the evidence of the Gospel, and determine rightly whether the prospect which it lays open to us in futurity, the hopes which it enkindles, be from God or not.

LECTURE IV.

THE RELIGIOUS OBLIGATION TO MORAL RECTITUDE.

Deut. xxxii. 4.

A GOD OF TRUTH AND WITHOUT INIQUITY, JUST AND RIGHT IS HE.

We have maintained the reality of a moral obligation to the Deity, as assumed and enforced in the Christian religion, which exhibits his goodness, or his claim upon our gratitude, as the basis of religious duties. Now, it seems very obvious that every human being, assenting to this principle of duty to the Creator, should either be seeking to know the will of God, or, if known, be concerned and occupied in obeying it. In this state of mind, he would be prepared to do justice to the credibility of the Scripture, under the description of a special appeal to the gratitude of mankind. But it is observable, as was remarked in the last discourse, that persons who reject or disesteem the Scriptures as an impro-

bable account of our moral relations to the Deity, are frequently, if not commonly, betrayed into habitual inattention to the nature of religion as a practical principle, and appear, for whatever reasons, to hold themselves exonerated from any proper obligation to God in the regulation of their affections and conduct; omitting the culture of piety, as commonly distinguished from morality, and observing the received rules of the latter under the influence of motives arising out of their condition as members of society, but in comparative indifference to the question whether an uniform rectitude of conduct be not incumbent on them as a course of obedience to the Supreme Being;—as though the Creator had abdicated his moral sovereignty over them, or there were no obligation remaining to consult his will, and to consider the particulars of their duty towards him, because a document, professing to bear a communication from himself, attributes to him a method of dealing with mankind, or a scheme of government over them, incompatible, as they affirm, with the proofs of his benevolence in the constitution of the world. As this is a state of mind which must effectually indispose a person for a full and impartial inquiry into the truth of Christianity, we adverted to the general confession of a personal demerit before God; and we insisted, that if the creation bears testimony to the goodness of its Author, it bears equal testi-

mony to our own ingratitude and disobedience towards him, and is, consequently, to say the least, most unreasonably urged in disparagement of a religion which opens its message to the world with a proclamation of forgiveness, and a call to repentance. Dismissing, then, a prejudication against Christianity, taken up, as must be owned, on superficial grounds, we proceed to the second of the two cardinal propositions which it was intended to maintain; namely, that the duty of gratitude to God dictates the practice of all moral rectitude, or the fulfilment of our duties to our fellow-creatures. This proposition is in a manner acceded to in the common acknowledgment of demerit before God, but that objection to the Scriptures which has just been considered sufficiently demonstrates that it is far from being duly weighed. In estimating the claims of Christianity under the aspect contemplated in these discourses, it is essential to appreciate it in a measure corresponding to the evidence on which it rests, as well as to the true extent of its import.

It should be observed then, in the first place, that, if we have assigned the true ground on which it is reasonable to conclude that the Creator demands our gratitude for the benefits which he has conferred upon us, we must hence infer that he demands, at the same time, the practice of every virtue in our relations

to our fellow-creatures. We have seen that that which commends the exercise of gratitude to the Creator is, specifically, the fact that our gratitude to a human benefactor springs up in our persuasion of his kindness towards us, and is morally approved as the growth of that persuasion;—in other words, that we are so constituted as to discern a moral rectitude in gratitude intrinsically—to approve ourselves in cherishing this affection, independently of our knowledge of the benefits derived to mankind at large from its prevalency as a principle of conduct. But if it be allowed that our moral approbation attaches, directly and ultimately, to gratitude as an affection of the mind, it will not, we presume, be disputed that it attaches, in the same manner, to other and to all upright affections of the mind. Indeed, we have had occasion to insist that by far the larger number, if not the great body, of those who professedly subscribe to the doctrine of expediency in morals, must find, on reflection, that they are resolving all virtue into a principle of universal benevolence, or a disposition to promote the common happiness; that is, that their moral approbation attaches to benevolence, and *terminates* on that affection. We repeat, then, if it be allowed that gratitude is right in itself, or independently considered, we may take for granted that other affections bearing that name are so likewise. It follows, that, if it be reason-

able to conclude that we are bound to exercise gratitude towards God, bound therefore to obey his will, it is equally reasonable to conclude that we fitly exemplify our gratitude, and actually obey his will, by the nurture and improvement of every virtuous principle of conduct towards our fellow-creatures. We are here maintaining the proposition before us on a ground, we are aware, which is not in general or readily suggested to the mind; for this reason, however, that the duty of gratitude to God, itself, is not in general or readily called into question, and, consequently, the particular fact in our moral experience, which demonstrates the reasonableness of that duty, is not brought prominently into view. We have already laid stress on the assent which is, at first, universally given to the duty of gratitude to the Creator, and have remarked, moreover, that even the most sceptical amongst us appear to admit that they should be bound to render obedience to God, if obedience to him were in reality demanded; inasmuch as the point they contend for is, the want of proof that he has actually imposed any law upon us. It could not, therefore, be expected that mankind would revert to an original moral obligation to obey the will of God, with a view to determine what that will is; and, in point of fact, it is customary to deduce the will of God itself, or his actual particular requirements, from our moral constitution in general.

But, nevertheless, when the duty of gratitude to the Creator, a spontaneous dictate of the human understanding in the belief of his benevolence, is perceived to be corroborated by subsequent reflection, the inference which has just been stated must also be perceived to be direct and inevitable. We perceive a reasonableness in the duty of gratitude to God, in the conviction that we judge this affection to be right in its exercise towards a fellow-creature for its own sake, as it is commonly expressed, irrespective of its undeniable tendency to promote the general welfare. Consequently, in acknowledging that primary duty to the Creator, we virtually acknowledge that all rectitude of heart and conduct is a service which we reasonably owe him; and that, however we may distinguish between piety and virtue, religion and morality, or whatever minor and subordinate purposes may be answered by this distinction, the latter is equally, in the nature of things, incumbent upon us in our moral relation to the Creator as the former. And more than this—it is a clear deduction of our reason, that if the Supreme Being should interpose preternaturally, should suspend the laws of the material universe, to break the slumbers of the human conscience, and assert his claim upon the gratitude of his creatures, such an interposition and assertion would be tantamount to a special declaration of his approbation and love of

all rectitude, and his unchanging purpose to promote it; that if he should contemplate some new and transcendent manifestation of his goodness towards them, his design would be to apply a new and transcendent motive to the consideration and fulfilment of all their duties; and that if he accompanied this signal display of his benevolence with a powerful application to their hopes and fears, announcing an unlimited reward to those who should bow to his gracious sceptre, and threatening the "despisers" of his goodness with a severer condemnation, he would still exhibit the same determination, compatibly with the conditions of a moral agency, to reclaim mankind from the practice of all evil, and uphold the law of rectitude in their reverent and studious observance. And this is surely a deduction of our reason which must exalt the pretensions of Christianity to the utmost in our view; for that such *is* the conduct attributed to the Deity in the Scriptures—that the *declared* scope of the Gospel is the recovery of mankind to the love and pursuit of all rectitude, as preparatory to a perfect and enduring happiness in a future state, few, we believe, are known to dispute.

We shall now argue the proposition before us on a more general and usual ground; and we proceed to observe, that the duty of gratitude to the Creator dictates the practice of all virtue, inasmuch as the conformity of virtue to his will

is directly suggested, or powerfully confirmed, by the moral judgments which we form of human actions in general; as those judgments are naturally and at first understood, and their import permanently acknowledged, by incomparably the larger portion of mankind.

But here it may be necessary to revert to some observations which were offered in our first discourse, as preliminary to the discussion of our subject. We have premised, it may be remembered, that in order to sustain the credibility of the Christian religion in its appeal to our moral judgments, it is necessary, and must in all reason be presumed, that those judgments convey that import which Christianity attaches to them with a corresponding force and universality of evidence; and we have also alleged the important fact, that mankind, for the most part, have so understood, and continue to understand, their moral judgments as to conclude the existence of an original, immutable standard of moral rectitude, or the reality of a merit and demerit in human beings. This conclusion we shall find to be expressly corroborative of the Christian religion, when it calls upon us to believe that in doing that which is morally right, we conform to the will of God, and in doing that which is morally wrong, we resist and disregard it.

There is, we do not forget, one school of ethical philosophy which gives an explanation of

our moral judgments, or notions of merit and demerit in ourselves and others, remarkably at variance with the prevailing conviction respecting them, and offering, we are compelled to admit, no argument for concluding that God has actually laid his commandment upon us, or requires any obedience at our hands: that section, we mean, of the advocates of expediency as the standard of morality, who, it will here suffice to observe, account for our notions of merit and demerit in such a manner, as to preclude the belief of a substantive reality in moral distinctions, and to bring us to the conclusion, that the strictly rational as well as actually prevailing inducement to the performance of actions denominated virtuous, is no other than a regard to that personal security, advantage, and enjoyment, which are derived to individuals from the countenance and favour of society. Such an explanation of our moral judgments it is incumbent we should discuss, and endeavour to appreciate, and we reserve it for particular consideration in the next discourse. Meanwhile, however, the fact itself, that any considerable number—though, speaking comparatively, few—should explain their moral judgments, or interpret the voice of conscience, so differently from the rest of the world, may appear incompatible with the very hypothesis that such judgments are appealed to in verification of a religion instituted by God, and

offered to the belief and acceptance of mankind in general. But we shall better estimate the weight of this objection, when we shall have given some attention to their ethical theory itself, and considered the nature of the evidence by which it is supposed to be established. It should be remarked, however, that some of these expositors of the human conscience have expressed an opinion, that the question whether Christianity be of God or not, is strictly independent of the manner in which we explain the formation of the moral judgments. These, we may infer, have been carried by a love of speculation to the adoption of a theory disowned in their feelings and conduct; and, on this supposition, we can hardly doubt that a closer examination would lead them to a detection of its fallacy. That the especial claims of Christianity are *not* independent of the question of our moral judgments, but deeply implicated in the purport conveyed by them, we endeavoured to make evident in our first discourse.

The mass of mankind, however, as was just remarked, have concurred in attaching a merit and demerit to themselves and others, which, to their apprehension, is essentially unexplained by that school of ethics to which we have adverted. They are well persuaded of the indispensable necessity, and incalculable advantages, to the whole community, of a general conformity to

moral rules, and they cannot but remark the keen sensibility, the strong affections, the various energetic principles of action, which are consequently put into operation, to induce every individual member of society to observe such rules himself, as well as to assist in imposing them on the observance of others. But however, in point of fact, they may be deterred from vice, or prompted to virtue, by a quick and perpetual sense of their dependence on the conduct and bearing of society towards them, they deliberately conclude that it would be right, or their duty, to abstain from the former and to practise the latter, in every particular instance, even were it possible they could be infallibly assured that they should neither incur the displeasure nor win the applause of their fellow-creatures. In judging actions to be right or wrong, "in judging, that they *ought* not to rob, or to kill, or to slander their neighbour, they discern a truth of which they are as well convinced as of any proposition in Euclid."[1] And this, it is well known, is not an explanation of the moral judgments given only by persons who yield at once to the spontaneous determinations of the understanding, but by those who search into the principles on which they are founded. It will be remembered on what philosophical authority, and with what strength of argument, it was

[1] Reid, Essay v. ch. 5.

recently maintained from this place, that we have as firm a basis for our convictions in this branch of intelligence as in any other; and that the facts alleged in proof of the contrary might, with equal reason, be held incompatible with the certainty of those truths on which the sciences are reared, as of those which constitute the foundation of morals.[1]

Moreover, as most persons, in judging that they ought or ought not to perform particular actions, discern a truth of which they are as certain as of any truth whatsoever, so they discern a reality in that virtue in which the truth is embodied. They perceive the moral attributes of a human being as distinctly, and with as sure a persuasion of their existence, as they perceive his intellectual faculties to be real and not imaginary existences. When observing in in-

[1] Professor Whewell (Foundation of Morals, Sermon II.) The passage cited from Dr. Reid expresses the certainty, or full conviction of truth and reality, of which most persons are conscious in their perception of that difference in actions on which the rules of morality are founded: the diversity in the moral judgments of mankind, which is so often alleged to confute that certainty, and has filled so large a space in ethical disputation, is, properly, a difference in applying the moral rules to particular actions. It must not be forgotten that an action is judged to be wrong as the effect of a certain principle of conduct; if it were not so—if we disapproved the *external* act, properly speaking, there would never be a difference of opinion as to whether a particular act were murder or not, robbery or not, slander or not. Moral distinctions, therefore,

dividuals a defect of gratitude, or fidelity, or benevolence, they perceive the mind to be as palpably wanting in that particular virtue, as they could perceive it to be deficient in memory, or judgment; nay, as they can perceive a person to want the proper members or due proportions of the human frame. But notwithstanding the far larger portion of mankind would thus explain their discernment of moral qualities; notwithstanding they thus approve, esteem, and venerate an individual for his deeds of goodness, and condemn as determinately the vicious person, holding his character in detestation and scorn; many, it appears, have never deduced or weighed this conclusion—one, however, which the established religion of the most enlightened nations conspicuously holds up to their attention—that such a constitution of their nature is

are not proved to be merely conventional or factitious, by a discrepancy of judgment among mankind as to whether an action be referrible to a particular principle of conduct or not, if there be no disagreement as to the principle itself. Thus, to take an example given by Dr. Chalmers in his Bridgewater Treatise, there may be a difference of opinion as to the justice and humanity of retaining any portion of our species in a state of slavery; but this is no proof that the distinctions of morality are uncertain and arbitrary, inasmuch as the disputants on that question are entirely unanimous in their approbation of justice and humanity. This distinction, so essential, has been dwelt upon by several eminent writers on ethics: it is clearly developed in the Treatise referred to, as well as illustrated in the unrivalled manner of its author. (Vol. i. pp. 84, &c.)

adapted, and was designed, to teach them, that in their conduct in general, one towards another and towards the whole community, they are subject to the approving and condemning judgment of God, as well as to their own. Nay, authors who have discoursed and expatiated on virtue, as itself a substantial and the chief good, and have sought to fix the attachment of the world on the virtuous *affections*, rejecting the opinion that it is our experience of their general utility which has led us to admire and extol them, — even these have dealt covert blows against the Christian religion, as though by asserting the reality, the intrinsic worth and excellence, the beauty, the sublimity of virtue, they were not, in effect, bearing testimony to the likelihood of its divine original; exhibiting its peculiar and impressive congruity with the moral sentiments; and laying open its deep foundations in the intellect and heart of man. The severance of morality from religion is, doubtless, in most instances, practical rather than strictly speculative; but it is generally and incalculably important to a just appreciation of Christianity, that our duties towards God and towards man should be distinctly perceived to be rooted in the same fact, or property, of our mental constitution—the discernment of a truth in our moral judgments, of a reality in the attributes of moral rectitude.

We are speaking of the great body of mankind who believe and testify that they have that discernment, and we submit that, with such a view of moral obligation, that philosophy is "falsely so called," which denies a proper connexion between morality and religion, and fails to recognise a religious obligation to the fulfilment of every social and relative duty. For if, in judging actions to be right or wrong, we believe this distinction to be a real one, and not merely verbal, or imaginary; if we believe mankind to be actually capable of the merit and demerit attributed to them, and therefore fitly subject to praise or blame, reward or punishment; have we not, to say the least, a presumption of cogent probability, that all moral rectitude is an object of approbation to the Deity, and that it is agreeable to his will that we should practise it? Is it not consonant to reason to frame our conception of the Being who created us, by ascribing to him qualities of our own mind, consistently, so far as permitted to our faculties, with the pure spirituality and absolute perfection of his nature? Nay, is it not from reflecting on our own intelligence and power, that we actually infer the existence of One whose intelligence and power infinitely transcend our own, as his works transcend all that human beings can design and accomplish? And if, in thus deducing the very *existence* of the Creator, we presume

our nature to bear a resemblance or analogy to his, shall we except from this analogy the most distinguishing attributes of a rational being—those of a moral agent?—notwithstanding, moreover, we speak of his benevolence—notwithstanding we assert this attribute of his character to be demonstrable from his works, and own his title to our gratitude and devotion? Can we deliberately doubt that our moral intelligence, in particular, is an emanation from his own, and witnesses that "He is a God of knowledge, by whom actions are weighed?" And when we consider the peculiar satisfaction which even the partial, imperfect goodness of human beings reflects into the minds of those who love and practise the right, can we hesitate to conclude that the consciousness of his own unblemished rectitude is an element of the perfect, ineffable happiness of God? Assuredly, the frame of the human mind bears testimony to the moral perfections and agency of God, as truly as it argues his existence and attributes at all; and responds to the declaration—be it written where it may—that "He is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works;" and, accordingly, that if we would conform to his will concerning us, we must seek "to be holy, even as he is holy."[1]

[1] "Is it possible," observes an excellent writer on the principles of natural religion, "for any man who believes God to be the Father, the designing Cause of spirits, of their intelli-

And yet more expressly, can we resist this conclusion, as it is argued from specific evidences

gence, liberty, and all their other rational faculties and enjoyments, to doubt whether he himself is possessed of intelligence, liberty, and rational enjoyments?—whether, since he has endued them with a power of self-reflection, particularly of reviewing their own affections and actions, and judging concerning their rectitude, his own actions, and the principles from which they spring, be not the object of his own understanding and attention?—whether, having annexed the highest enjoyment to their self-approbation upon this review, and made their principal happiness to depend upon it, he possesses the like, or a more exalted enjoyment of his own actions and principles of actions? And this being the sum of what we mean by moral agency, can we doubt whether God be a moral agent?"—*Abernethy's Discourses*, vol. ii. *Serm.* I.

We shall quote another observation from this author, in the same discourse, on the rectitude of the Deity as distinguished from that of man, with a view to remark its important bearing on the doctrine that all moral rectitude is founded in benevolence: a doctrine to which, in arguing the positions maintained in these discourses, we are brought into considerable opposition. "The virtues," he observes, "which have a large share in a good human character, and indeed the greatest part of the moral system, as accommodated to our dependent and imperfect state, can have no place in the perfections of the Deity, or be any otherwise attributed to him, than as by his authority he enjoins, and by his perfect rectitude, wisdom, and goodness, approves them. Of righteousness as practised by him we must form an idea, abstracting from all kinds of subjection or indigence as much as possible; but remembering, on the contrary, the absolute supremacy of his dominion, the glorious immutable excellence of his nature, and felicity of his condition." Now, in our apprehension, the moralists and divines who have contended that all rectitude is subordinated to and comprised in benevolence, have adopted this opinion, principally, through inattention to the important

of *design* in the constitution of our nature? The Author of our being has formed us to believe a

distinction here pointed out between moral excellence as exemplified by God and as exemplified by man. In their speculations on the character or moral agency of the Deity, they have been led to the conclusion that benevolence is the sole or the governing principle of his conduct. Hence they have inferred that it is, or should be, the governing principle of our own; not reflecting, it would seem, that moral rectitude must vary in its manifestations with the particular relations which intelligent beings sustain towards each other. The presiding principle of virtue in the parent towards the child is benevolence; but it is not so, surely, in the child towards the parent. The analogous relation of the Creator to the creature must suggest a far wider distinction of the same nature. Had this been considered, it could hardly have been concluded that, because the benevolence of the Deity is everywhere and continually engaging our attention and inspiring our devotion, the principle of benevolence should comprehend and absorb every other attribute of goodness in the mind of man: still less could it have been laid down, especially as no such doctrine is taught us in the Scripture, that the perfection of piety consists in a strictly disinterested love of God; as though we had received or expected nothing at his hands for which to be grateful; for clearly there could be no place for gratitude if all concern in our own happiness were extinguished. The author himself, whom we have just cited, considers that the moral agency of the Deity towards mankind may reasonably be regarded as a scheme of benevolence; but he keeps in view an essential difference between the relation of the Creator to ourselves, and of ourselves to him and to one another. Regarding benevolence as *one* principle of moral rectitude, there need be no fear of exalting it above its excellence and value; and it is expressly this attribute of the Deity which the Scripture enjoins mankind to imitate in their conduct one towards another;—enjoins this, however, as an exercise of gratitude to himself; thereby evincing, as we have elsewhere

difference in actions, and thereby to institute rules for the regulation of our conduct one to another:—rules so evidently founded in the nature of things, and so imperative in their character, that we signify and describe them by terms and phrases expressive, to the utmost, of their fundamental truth and supreme authority. He has formed us to perceive nothing so essentially proper to human beings, so worthy, excellent, and amiable, as the attributes of moral rectitude; to hold, in comparison with these, the adventitious distinctions of rank, and wealth, and power, or great natural talents, to be utterly base and contemptible; and to reproach, and scorn, and loathe ourselves, when reflecting that we feel and act as if they were not so. Is it possible to evade or overcome the conviction, that, whatever be our actual character and doings, the Almighty created and designed us for the practice of virtue; and that the structure of the human mind bears its testimony to the credibility

observed, our benevolence to a fellow-creature to be "a reasonable service" to God.

With reference to the position that the whole procedure of the Deity is one of benevolence, it appears to require a considerable degree of explanation. As was remarked, however, in the last discourse, his benevolence to *accountable* beings must be chiefly displayed in his forgiveness of the penitent; and, if this be assented to, we are not solicitous to reconcile with that position all the conditions and results of a probationary state; and may leave to those who make this knot the task of untying it.

of the Gospel, so far, at least, as this instructs us to account ourselves "the workmanship of God, created unto good works, which he hath before ordained that we should walk in them?" But if so—is there any other conclusion relating to virtue of equal practical interest and importance? Is it possible that a rational creature can propose to himself a question of any comparable moment with the following:—Do I habitually neglect or regard the will of the Supreme Being? Do I voluntarily acquiesce in and promote the purpose for which he brought me into existence, or must I confess that I counteract and oppose it? Is my mind in an attitude of resistance to the Deity, or are my affections allied to the objects of his approbation, and the end of his works? Is there any question relating to the obligations of morality of perceptible weight in comparison with this? In other words, are there any motives to upright and virtuous conduct, derivable from our connexion with our fellow-creatures, of the smallest significance when weighed in the balance with those of religion? Is there any consideration so fitted to deter a man from the wrong, or arrest him in a vicious course, as that in yielding to a corrupt propensity, in committing an immoral act, he is exposing a mind at issue with the counsel, at enmity with the character, of that Being whose perfections surpass our faculties, and suspend

them in astonishment, and the terribleness of whose power is not only that it is irresistible, but that those who sink under it must own the sentence against them to be just? That philosophy, we repeat, must surely be "falsely so called," which, admitting the essential distinctions of moral character, stops at the conclusion, that in our conduct, right and wrong, one to another, we provoke the hostility, or attract the favour, of our fellow-creatures; or which carries us no farther than the pursuit of that satisfaction which unquestionably appertains to the consciousness of having done the right to our fellow-creatures.

It were impossible, in the compass of a few remarks, to do justice to those considerations which have led inquiring and reflecting persons, for the most part, as well as others, to regard the dictates of the conscience as virtually declaratory of the law and government of God, and to expect some final retribution for good and evil actions in a future state. We shall only add, that this conclusion must obtain a tenacious hold upon every individual who applies himself, considerately, to this question:—Reflecting upon the uncertainty and feebleness of human virtue in general, which have at all times been observed and acknowledged; reflecting upon the numerous temptations to do wrong, and their palpable and extensive power upon mankind; what would be the *consequences* of a general persuasion, that,

endowed though we were with perceptions of moral rectitude, as well as feelings of a corresponding nature inclining us to exemplify it in our conduct, the utmost we could hope to accomplish by a steadfast course of virtue, was to establish our integrity in the eyes of men, and to realize the happiness which virtue might bestow upon us in the present life? What would be the consequence, if all were assured that, apart from the experience and prospects of this world, their knowledge and sensibility as moral agents might be safely slighted and overcome, and sacrificed to the impulse of the passions, and even to their habitual predominance; if all *faith* in our moral convictions were done away, and none remained to sustain the resolutions of the virtuous, or to awe and trouble the wrong-doer;—the faith, we mean, that God will surely own and vindicate the expressions of his will in the constitution of our nature; and that, however vice may prosper and triumph, or escape detection for a season, and the just and good be injured and defamed, he will at length appear in the cause of the upright, and put to confusion the doers of iniquity; making proof that, though "clouds and darkness are round about him, righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne?"

But there is a remarkable inconsistency in our actual views and feelings on this head, which

may carry a more powerful conviction to some minds, if not to most, than any general reasoning, however cogent and difficult of refutation. The inconsistency is, that there are some actions, the more heinous crimes, which almost irresistibly suggest the apprehension of God's displeasure to the very persons who, in reference to human conduct in general, whether their own or that of others, entertain but fugitive impressions of a religious obligation. For example, what is that which renders the perpetration—the thought of murder so revolting to our moral principles;—which gives to that crime an aspect so grim and frightful, that all, but the most vicious and depraved amongst us, would recoil with horror from such an apparition of evil; well knowing that, should they be effectually tempted to take the life of a fellow-creature, they would burden the conscience with a peculiar and most intolerable remorse? Undoubtedly, the law of self-preservation would incline us to shrink from an act which we know to be punishable by death; but, till recently, other crimes also were punishable by death, the commission of which, notwithstanding, could never have been contemplated with equal terror and abhorrence. Does not the idea of murder at once fill our thoughts with the offended majesty and the avenging power of God? Do we not feel assured that, could we harbour an incentive

to that deed, the eye of the Omniscient would penetrate our soul, and search it to its deepest recesses; and that the vision of his uplifted arm would stagger and appal our resolution? And will any consent to account this a superstitious imagination?—as undeniably it is—for we must look our opinions in the face—as undeniably it is, *if morality be no part of religion.* In the minds of most men, however, there is small room for doubt that the blood of the innocent cries to God for vengeance. But if we thus look upon murder, and the most atrocious crimes, as acts of rebellion against the authority of our Creator, are we not chargeable with egregious inconsistency in abandoning the belief, or cherishing a doubt, of his supreme dominion over us in the general conduct of our lives? For if the dread of God's displeasure in the destruction of human life be not a vain imagination, can it be made a question whether it ought to be continually present to us, as a check to every injurious act whatsoever? If God be the protector of the life of our fellow-man, can any one seriously doubt that he is the protector of his property, and reputation, and feelings—of all his rightful happiness? Assuredly none. If it be fit that we should bow and tremble before the Creator as the observer of any one action of our lives, undeniably it is fit that we should acknowledge him in the discharge of every duty, in the

conduct of every transaction with our neighbour: the light and influence of religion should fill the whole circle of our relative duties. It cannot for an instant be allowed that, as God has formed us for a nice discrimination of moral qualities, he takes cognizance only of the worst crimes; his judgment concerning us must extend to every action we perform, to every volition in our capacity as moral agents. But, in truth, such exceptions, to a too prevailing inconsideration of his presence and authority, might well engage our attention as lamentable proofs of that natural defection from our duty towards him, which the Scripture has so expressly imputed to our species. At least, if such a defection had taken place, how could it have been more surely betrayed, than by the fact that our sense of duty towards God was arrested and shocked only by ideas of the most flagitious offences against him? And, be this as it may, what can so unanswerably demonstrate to our own conviction, that the heart is actually hardened, and has "waxed gross" in its moral sensibility towards God, if nothing less than such deeds as do violence, so to speak, to our moral feelings can affect us with the turpitude of sinning against him; force from us the tears of contrition, or extort the pangs of remorse?—But we must dismiss the particular subject of this discourse.

Before concluding, however, there is one infe-

rence from the preceding argument, which we are solicitous should not be overlooked or unconsidered. We have seen that our moral judgments, as they are generally understood, lend a powerful confirmation to a principal assumption of the Christian religion—namely, that God requires the fulfilment of our duties to our fellow-creatures, as an exemplification of obedience to himself; nay, that to reject this conclusion, and, notwithstanding, to adhere to the reality of moral distinctions, is apparently incompatible with any philosophy but that which disowns the belief of God's existence, and merits no better description than that of practical atheism—"knowing God, but not glorifying him as God." It follows then, and is necessarily implied, that that assumption of the Scriptures is true—that is, that it is really authoritative on our conduct, whether the Scriptures themselves be a divine revelation or not. The implication is inevitable, yet it appears to be far from generally obvious. We have been led to remark, in the discussion of our subject, a very frequent connexion, to say the least, between a disbelief of Christianity and an indifference to religion as a practical principle, or as the presiding motive of our conduct as moral agents. Persons appear to imagine that if the divine institution of the Gospel be disproved, they are exempted from the duties of religion altogether, and, expressly,

from the obligation to a pure morality in obedience to the will of God. The consequence is, that they are little disposed for a close and impartial examination of the evidence on which it rests; whereas it is precisely when we regard religion in its practical nature, when we consider the gratitude due to the Creator as a principle of obedience to his will, that we clearly recognise the religious duty of giving our attention to Christianity, or any particular religion, at all; of ascertaining and considering its special purport; and of examining in general the evidence of its divine authority. For the prevalence of such a notion, various causes might be assigned; but it is certainly very much fostered by an opinion that every principle of religion acknowledged amongst us is founded on the testimony of the Scripture, and that exclusively; and, consequently, must stand or fall with the proof of its divine inspiration. We assert, on the contrary, that the assumption of the Scripture which has been brought under consideration, though undoubtedly confirmed and placed above question in the belief of Christianity, is true, is practically obligatory upon us, whether the Scripture be a divine revelation or not.

An individual who professed to be divinely commissioned and inspired, to be an apostle of God, made the following assertion concerning the Heathen :—" For when the Gentiles, which have

not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these having not the law, are a law unto themselves; which shew the work of the Lord written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another."—That is, he asserted that the substance of a moral law, which had been formally announced to the Jews as the law of God, was discernible by the Heathen, was actually known amongst them, in whatever degree, and in particular instances obeyed, however defectively (so his language appears to imply)—he asserted that that law was perceptible to the understanding of those who had never been privileged, as this individual would have said, by a preternatural communication from God; that it lay among the elements of human knowledge, and was actually binding upon all mankind. Now, without affirming or denying this individual to have been, as he announced himself to be, a messenger from God, he may have declared what was true in the words which have been cited. Conclude him to have been an impostor if you will, the reasoning remains the same, and is all untouched, which founds the conclusion—one which has actually prevailed with more or less certainty and comprehensiveness in all ages—that we are subject, as voluntary agents, to the government of God, and that the precepts of virtue are laws

which he has enjoined upon us. The same individual, when alleging the immoral practices which had prevailed among mankind, affirmed that they "knew," or might have known, had the evidence in their own conscience, "that they which commit such things are worthy of death."[1] Here again, he might have affirmed the truth, even if it were proved that he had deceived himself, or others, in announcing himself as a messenger from God. Surely it is not our belief of the Scriptures, only, which convinces us that the vices and crimes of men are offences against God, and urgent reasons for the dread of punishment at his hands.

We would therefore admonish any one who, in discarding his belief of the Scriptures, entertains a notion, though probably vague and indeterminate, that he is absolved from religious obligations, and is now at liberty to observe the rules of morality to whatever extent, and from whatever motives it may please him,—we admonish him to beware lest he cherish a hollow and most perilous delusion; if indeed he be not already entangled in the known "deceitfulness of sin." What, though he has refuted, as he believes, the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, has he thereby discovered a vindication, or excuse, or the shadow of an excuse, for a single act or disposition which he perceives to be a departure

[1] Rom. i. 32.

from rectitude, and to partake of the nature of vice and irreligion? Can his disbelief of Christianity obliterate the proofs of God's existence; or disprove the relations which his own reason may suffice to convince him that he bears to the Author of his nature? Can it break up the foundations of religion in the human mind? Can objections to the divine mission of Christ and his Apostles ground a probability that the judgments of the conscience, its monitions and remonstrances, and bitter accusations, bespeak no commandment from the Creator, convey no sound of his voice, augur no verdict of acquittal or condemnation at his tribunal? No: our disbelief of Christianity can only deprive us of an infinite consolation and encouragement in our sense of personal demerit, and exertions to fulfil the law of our own mind. For this is a religion which exhibits the unfailing mercy of God as a commanding motive of obedience to his will, and devotion to his service; which answers our efforts and aspirations after moral excellence by special promises of assistance here, and reward hereafter; seconding and animating our endeavours to embody in our conduct our ideas of the right and the good, and to attain that virtue, that "true holiness," which we perceive to be necessary to realize the original type of our nature, and to fulfil the end of our creation—a religion which aims to detach our

affections from things transient and precarious, and to engage us in the nurture and promotion of those principles in our nature, which yield a satisfaction that promises to outlive the pleasures of sense, and the enjoyments of this world; which argue our capacity for a happiness unmixed and enduring;—principles which betoken a peculiar affinity to the Being who created us,—to Him who is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

LECTURE V.

AN ADVERSE THEORY OF ETHICS EXAMINED.

1 *Sam.* ii. 3.

BY HIM ACTIONS ARE WEIGHED.

We have now arrived at the conclusion, that that construction which the bulk of mankind have placed, and continue to place, on the moral judgments, is directly answerable to the declaration of Scripture, that God requires our gratitude, and, as an exercise and proof of that affection, the practice of virtue in general, or the fulfilment of our duties towards our fellow-creatures. There is, however, one school of ethical philosophy, maintaining utility to be the foundation of morals, which explains the formation of our moral judgments, or accounts for our apprehension, or supposed discernment, of merit and demerit in ourselves and others, in a manner essentially differing from the rest of mankind, and supplying, it must be admitted,

no proof or indication that the Deity requires us to practise virtue, or that we are subject to his law and government as moral agents, and amenable to his tribunal.

This explanation of our moral judgments we have heretofore endeavoured to keep distinct, and we now proceed to bring it under some examination; with a view to estimate the weight of that objection, which it may appear to offer to the credibility of the Christian religion, in its appeal to those judgments for proof and confirmation. In consistency, however, with the more general design of these discourses, we must comprise our observations on this particular theory within the limits of a single discourse.

There is, then, a section of ethical writers who account for the sense of moral obligation, substantially, in the following manner:—Individuals, as all must know, are, naturally, and apart from moral restraint and discipline, incited to actions detrimental, in a greater or less degree, to the welfare of society, and even opposed to its existence; and they are also capable of actions more or less calculated to strengthen its security, and bring accessions to its happiness. It is equally certain that, inasmuch as individuals compose the society which is thus affected by the conduct of its members, there must be a general resistance to actions

prejudicial to the community, or, in other words, a general aversion and hostility to the doers of them; and that, on the contrary, there must be a general desire for actions of an opposite description, or attachment and favour towards those who perform them. "What all men," it has been said, "are exposed to suffer by, all men are disposed to hate,"[1] and it is equally true that what all men expect to profit by, all men are disposed to love. It must be farther observed, that notwithstanding we are naturally incited to actions pernicious to society, we are formed to sympathise with the pains and pleasures of others, and, so far as this tendency of our nature is unopposed by our personal inclinations and schemes, we actually experience a satisfaction in contemplating and promoting their happiness. This, of course, must enhance that disgust and animosity on the one hand, and that complacency and favour on the other, with which we look upon the conduct of individuals, in its influence on the interests and welfare of mankind at large. We need not trace more particularly the operation of such feelings to their consequences. Suffice it to say, that society imposes on its members certain rules of conduct, forbidding actions inimical to its happiness, and enjoining others subservient to

[1] Bentham on Morals and Legislation, vol. i. p. 32.

its objects and prosperity; and that individuals are deterred from violating such rules, by the dread of penal law or the public odium, as well as prompted and animated to obey them, by the prospect of obtaining the general estimation and applause. Now, it is the connexion existing between our conformity to such rules and our reception of the countenance and favour of society, which will be found to create the sense of moral obligation, or the notions of merit and demerit in ourselves and others.

To do justice, however, to this theory on the basis of ethics, there are one or two particulars which should be matter of specific observation. It should be distinctly remarked, as indeed already intimated, that, although its advocates refer to society the creation of our moral sentiments, they are not compelled to limit its agency to the institution of government, or the enactment of civil laws. They may properly comprehend, within the sphere of its controlling influence, the aggregate of those powerful motives which are brought to operate upon the minds of individuals, by the universal solicitude and endeavours to uphold the authority, and commend the observance, of laws and precepts essential to the defence of the whole community, and indefinitely advantageous to its interests. It should be observed, moreover, that they do not, of necessity, imply that individuals must

themseves be clearly apprized of the origin of moral rules, or the inducements by which they are actuated in conforming to them. Indeed, the more able advocates of this theory are observant of the fact, that mankind are naturally inclined to suppose, as the bulk of them actually believe, that their moral approbation of actions, together with their promptitude and satisfaction in performing them, are attributable to a moral rectitude in the actions themselves; and they assign a particular process in the mind to account for this supposition and belief;—whether adequate to their purpose or not, will be considered in the sequel.

What they insist upon is, that every individual cannot but perceive himself to be surrounded with relations of dependence on the proceedings and disposition of society towards him, and, accordingly, cannot but associate his own obedience and uniform regard to moral rules with his personal safety, and advantage, and gratification; and they maintain that it is this connexion of ideas—undoubtedly a very intimate and permanent one—which originates the sense of duty or moral obligation.[1]

[1] In our consideration of this theory, which we have stated as fully as our limits would allow, and with as much appearance of probability as we could collect from the writings of its advocates, we have given our attention, more particularly, to the second volume of Mr. Mill's Analysis of the Phenomena

Now a number of facts are alleged in support of this theory, in themselves indisputably true, as well as of very much interest and importance, and this may be said of theories in general, which have been elaborated to a semblance of truth by a succession of ingenious advocates. The question to be determined is, are these facts strictly appropriate to the theory which they are brought to establish—that is, are they to be accounted for solely on its principles? It has been repeatedly and, as we conceive, successfully argued, that they are equally compatible with that apprehension of moral distinctions which is allowed to be natural to the human mind, and

of the Human Mind; and also to a recent publication, entitled—"A Discourse on Ethics of the School of Paley, by William Smith, Esq." (Pickering.) The latter work, written in a style better calculated to engage the attention of most readers than the former, contains, in the compass of a few pages, a very able exposition of this theory, which has never, we believe, met with a more ingenious as well as eloquent advocate. The author, however, considers the foundation of religious belief to be strictly independent of the principles of morals. "The Christian," he observes, "is not a religious man because he is a moral being, but he practises morality from motives which no system of ethics can supply." This opinion is peculiar and, it may readily be perceived, has affected the tone of his sentiments. He is manifestly solicitous that the system he defends may appear to be entirely consistent with an independent love of virtue, and may harmonize with the feelings of those who practise it for its own sake; occasionally breathing a spirit far from kindred, we conceive, to the school which he advocates;—a school we must add, which, it were easy to prove, is not that of Paley.

is actually prevalent in the world; while it leaves that apprehension itself most imperfectly or altogether unexplained. But it seems most important, in the first place, to a correct appreciation of this theory, as an explanation of our moral judgments, to ascertain what that is for which, it would lead us to conclude, a man is judged to be upright and virtuous—that for which he actually obtains the moral approbation of mankind, whether they are cognizant of the qualities for which they award it him or not; for, as it was expressly premised in our first discourse, the prevailing conclusion of mankind, that there exists an original independent standard of moral rectitude, is derived, not from their actual feelings and conduct, but from their judgment as to what is "right" in their feelings and conduct—derived from the *understanding* in its discernment of what is morally approvable in their dispositions and practices.—We shall afterwards consider the process of mind, by which the current apprehension of merit and demerit in human beings is accounted for by the advocates of this theory, and the nature of the evidence by which, as they allege, it is explained and disposed of.

But before we proceed to these topics, it should be remembered that, in premising, in our first discourse, the necessity of distinguishing, in our inquiries into the principles of morals,

between that which is actually felt and done by mankind, and that which is judged to be right in their feelings and doings, we anticipated a mode of reasoning which seems to have been, more than any other, adopted in support of the theory in question, and which consists in collecting a number of instances tending to show that individuals are actually and powerfully and, we are called to infer, exclusively influenced in their conduct by a regard to the sanctions and favour of society.[1] That important distinction it is not our purpose to insist upon in the present discourse; but we must remark that it deserves a particular observation in estimating the sufficiency of the ethical theory in question. We should keep it in view, especially, when specific instances are laid before us, in which the pleasurable or painful feelings which men experience, in reflecting on the moral quality of their own actions, are alleged to be irreconcilable with the conclusion that actions are right or wrong intrinsically; and which are brought forward to prove, on the contrary, that our notions of merit and demerit are traceable to nothing more than the requirements and sanctions of society. In reference to all such instances, it should be inquired whether the pleasurable and painful feelings are the whole of the moral phenomena:

[1] P. 17.

whether there is not a judgment approving or disapproving the feelings themselves.[1]

We may here, moreover, take some notice of a fact alleged in support of this theory, which, vague as it is in its character, and irrelevant, as we conceive, to the question at issue, appears,

A strong instance of this nature is alleged in the following statement:—"It is a fact which will not be disputed, that there is a vast difference between the remorse felt when a crime has been actually committed, and when its perpetration, though fully resolved on, has been accidentally defeated. The real murderer experiences a very different remorse from him whose murderous intention has been balked by some unlooked-for occurrence. In this last person, the sentiment of remorse may be almost entirely overpowered by one of joy, at having escaped the commission of so heinous and penal an offence. Yet the guilt, all moralists tell us, lies in the intention, which in both individuals might have been equally determined, equally malignant. How is this to be explained? On our system the solution is at hand. The intention of an agent is, indeed, that which the judgment of a rational society is chiefly levelled against—the intention is the very cause of the injury, and it betrays a mind within likely to be the source of similar injuries; but while society directs its displeasure to the intention of the criminal, with the criminal himself, it is not *his intention*, but the judgment of society that is the source of that moral awe by which he is impressed. While, therefore, nothing but a murderous thought, hidden from all observers, has passed through his mind, he is free; if he is not a religious man, he goes on his way quite at liberty." (Discourse on Ethics, p. 34.) Now, taking this statement without question or qualification, what does it amount to? Simply this—that a person who, intending to commit the crime of murder, is prevented from carrying his intention into execution, is not affected, pained, and shocked in his *feelings* in reflecting on his *intention* to commit that crime; and that, on the contrary,

notwithstanding, to produce some impression in its favour. It is that our moral sentiments are the growth of a state of society. Now a state of society is so essential to inform and cultivate the human mind, and so intimately involved in the very conception of our rational nature, that man, as a perfectly isolated being, is a creature

he may rejoice in his escape from the punishment which he placed himself in danger of incurring. The writer does not state—and could he state?—that the individual in question deliberately *judges* himself innocent notwithstanding his *intention* to commit the crime; or even that he does not judge himself, *in foro conscientiæ*, equally guilty as if he had effected his intention; nay more, that he will not, at a future period, if he do not even already, judge the present state of his mind to be morally wrong, to be wanting in the compunction due for guilt. But indeed, with reference to the fact itself stated by the author, we might inquire, whether the intention itself is not, of necessity, made more manifest to the individual who formed it by its having been embodied in action; at least whether, since it has not proceeded into act, there be not some inlet to a presumption on his part, that the intention itself was not completed. There are other considerations to be taken into the account, but our object is to point attention to the important distinction overlooked in this example, as in numerous instances of a like nature.—A stress is often laid upon the lax morality practised by men collectively, or when united in bodies, especially in nations—that is, when there is no dread of society to deter them from injustice. Of such lax morality there can be no doubt; but if the dread of society be the source of our ideas of what is wrong, what is "worthy" of punishment, whence is it that we have come to perceive and remark, if not to despise and abhor, this lax morality of bodies of men—of whole societies—of nations?

of which we have strictly no knowledge, and must strive to imagine. We can derive but little help then, towards the elucidation of our moral sentiments, from the fact that they are the growth of a state of society. Unquestionably they are so, together with immeasurably the larger portion of human ideas and feelings, as plants are the product of the soil; but if it were sought to ascertain the nature and properties of one plant in particular, would any one state, in explanation, that it sprung from the earth, or was found in the bed of universal vegetation? But more particularly—in our intercourse and transactions *one with another* we judge some actions to be different in their nature from others; a difference which we signify by the terms "right" and "wrong." A question is raised as to the purport of these judgments, and the design of the Creator in so constituting the human mind as that we naturally and universally form such judgments. To affirm, then, that they are the growth of society is, in effect, to affirm nothing more than that without society such a question could never have occurred; for the actions themselves could never have been performed which we judge to be different in their nature, and pronounce to be right or wrong. Such an affirmation can only divert attention from the question itself; for surely, it would not be maintained, *à priori*, that human beings could

not be so constituted as to acquire that real personal rectitude, of which they are commonly believed to be capable, in a state of society; or that a state of society could not be introductory to a sense of duty to the Creator—could not be a school of religion.

But, as we have said, in dealing with this theory we are principally concerned to elicit the conclusion, which it necessarily involves, as to what that is which procures to an individual a moral approbation, and is termed his moral rectitude. For, we apprehend, this theory is indebted for a certain degree of plausibility, and the measure of acceptance which it obtains, to nothing so much as this, that its chief distinction and peculiarity, that in which it essentially differs from the common persuasion on the subject, as well as the primary assumptions of the Scripture, is, in a great measure, concealed under the guise of the ordinary phraseology relating to the subject of morals: that phraseology calling up ideas in connexion with the theory in question, which appertain to an essentially different construction of the moral judgments. What then is that which, according to this account of our moral judgments, would entitle an individual, or which actually procures to him, a moral approbation for actions denominated right and virtuous—that which constitutes his merit or moral rectitude. This, in the prevailing apprehension of

virtue, must be looked for in the dispositions by which he is actuated in performing them. Now the more able advocates of this theory, it has been already intimated, have laid some stress on the principle of sympathy, or the fact that we naturally participate the pains and pleasures, the suffering and enjoyment, of others; that we have kind affections, a spontaneous benevolence, interesting us in the welfare of our fellow-creatures. But it should be considered, and indeed it is implied in this theory, that such affections, however essential to the constitution of human nature, in its moral as well as other capacities, cannot be objects of a moral approbation, unless subordinated to rules of conduct which contemplate the safety and well-being of the whole community. A parent, for example, may be exquisitely alive to the pains and pleasures of his offspring; but his sensibility in their behalf is the reverse of virtuous, if it impels him to defraud the families of others in order to enrich his own. Indeed our sympathy in general is, in itself, a most uncertain index of the moral character. It may be enlisted on the side of vice, as well as in the cause of virtue; it may be given to the authors, as well as the sufferers, of injustice; it may kindle with and extend the worst passions of our nature. Undeniably, the natural affections and a spontaneous benevolence, as it is called, are properly subject to a moral regulation, and

are virtuous only so far as they are really so subject. What then, according to the theory under discussion, is that disposition in the strength and predominance of which an individual subordinates to rules of conduct, instituted for the benefit of the whole community, his inclinations and propensities in general, including his natural tendency to enter into and participate the feelings of others?—What is that disposition which bears the name of virtue? Now this, it must be farther considered, is not a desire of that happiness to society which his actions and course of life are actually calculated to promote; for we are not here disputing that account of virtue which resolves it into the exercise of a principle of general benevolence. Nor is it a voluntary and habitual subjection to a law of equity, dictating to ourselves the same conduct towards others, as it would lead us to demand from others towards ourselves; it is not a ready acquiescence in that law—not a *moral* sympathy, as it may be truly called in distinction from a natural sympathy, which, according to this theory, commands a moral approbation; nor, as we have remarked, is it a prevailing desire to augment the general happiness. These are principles of human conduct which its teachers hold to be entirely imaginary, and to have no place in the efforts and career of virtue. They maintain, as we have seen, that the sense of moral obligation

is created by the resistance which is made by society to conduct prejudicial to its welfare, and the encouragement which it offers to conduct of a directly opposite tendency. It follows then that the "moral rectitude" of a man consists in his yielding to that resistance, and responding to that encouragement. He is virtuous in shrinking from the commission of a crime, because he shrinks from the punishment which society threatens to inflict, in one mode or other, on its perpetrator; and he is virtuous in aspiring to deeds of justice and beneficence, because he aspires to its applause and favour, and expects that he shall, sooner or later, obtain them. We repeat, in judging of this theory, it is, in the first place and principally, essential that this import which it would compel us to attach to the term "rectitude," this conclusion, as to what that is for which we approve ourselves or others, should be steadily and even pertinaciously detained before the mind; for, as we have said, it is continually escaping from our view,—while something, in the shape and mask of virtue, passes, in a manner, for virtue itself, which could only move contempt and loathing, but that it disguises and arrays itself in the full and flowing robe of the ancient and universal phraseology.

To take an example—a good name, a fair reputation, is an element of our happiness second to none in our relation to our fellow-creatures, or

on this side the grave. It is commonly regarded and spoken of as a reward "due" to virtue; and one which, speaking generally, or in auspicious times like the present, it may reasonably expect, at some period, to obtain. Accordingly, in the pursuit of this great object of human desire, the counsel universally given to us, is, to act in such a manner as to deserve it; not merely to seem virtuous, but to be so; not merely to pretend to the qualities of moral excellence, but really to possess them. Now it merits observation, that the advocates of the theory in question would give us this counsel, and give it in precisely the same language; but are we, or they, immediately aware that according to their account of moral obligation, to "deserve the approbation of society," and to "take the surest course to obtain it," are but different expressions for precisely the same thing. In common speech, when it is said of an individual that he "deserves" universal approbation, it is intended to signify his possession of a quality distinct from the wish and endeavour to obtain that approbation, and capable of existing, in the highest degree, though the desire of esteem and commendation, with which it is generally and intimately blended, may be felt very feebly and, possibly, not at all. In the theory in question, there is no recognition of such a quality whatsoever. The moral obligation to perform a class of actions is created, as

has just been said, by society demanding and rewarding them, and obviously the "desert" of its approbation must consist in the fulfilment of the moral obligation. It follows that to deserve approval, to merit reward from society, is nothing more than to nourish a desire and to put forth efforts to obtain it. To possess, and not merely to pretend to, virtue, is to be in reality, or practically, swayed by a desire of the general approbation, and not merely to pretend to act under its influence and ascendancy. Of course, as the duty to abstain from vicious acts, from acts pernicious to society, is brought into existence by society itself forbidding and punishing them, to deserve the reproach and hostility of society, by committing such acts, must signify precisely this—to expose ourselves to an imminent danger of incurring them. It is common to speak of a self-approbation in the remembrance that we have done our duty, or the consciousness of virtuous feelings and intentions. It must be kept in view that the philosophy we are now contemplating brings into light no other matter for self-approbation, and the satisfaction which attends it, than an ever-present predominating desire of retaining the countenance of society, or augmenting our share of its favourable regard. To urge this topic no farther, it must be sufficiently manifest that, in dealing with this theory of ethics, we do not readily distinguish

its specific and peculiar import; and that what is most necessary, in order to appreciate its merits, is to determine the meaning which it would compel us to place on the language current among us on the subject: that language being, evidently, the medium through which we discover whether, and how far, the exposition which it has given us of our moral judgments be similar, or wholly foreign and opposite, to our own.[1]

[1] That we have not unnecessarily pressed this point must be evident, we conceive, if the endeavour be made to discriminate that import which would be actually conveyed by the current language in morals, or which should be reasonably affixed to it, if this theory were accepted as true.—"There is," observes an author alluded to in a former note, "but one sure way of obtaining the approbation of men, namely, by deserving it, by really possessing, and not only pretending to those qualities on which it is bestowed. And praise, when gained in any other way, and divorced from the consciousness of deserving it, is a momentary, precarious gratification, alloyed, even while it lasts, with anticipations of a retributive contempt and indignation." (Discourse on Ethics, p. 18.) Again, Mr. Mill, in describing the conflict of feelings in the mind of a man when tempted to commit a great crime, particularizes, as a motive calculated to deter him, his dread of "the moral indignation of mankind," and "the future reproaches of his own mind." Elsewhere he speaks of "deeds which incur the execration of mankind, and of the "agonizing state of remorse." Now it is not, we imagine, till the reader of this language, in an exposition of the theory before us, has reflected a little, that he becomes distinctly apprised that, if this theory be correct, what is commonly signified by "desert" of retribution, by "guilt" incurring a moral indignation, has no existence, and that the *notion* of its existence is verily *caused* by that moral indignation and

That the theory before us gives an interpretation of our moral judgments, which, in no degree, supports the conclusion that God requires us to practise virtue, that he has laid his commandment upon us as voluntary agents, and that we are subject to his approval and disapproval, we need

retribution, so called, which particular actions are said to "deserve." Nothing, however, can be more explanatory of such language, consistently with the principles of this theory, than the construction placed upon it by Mr. Mill himself; and the following passage might have spared us the endeavour to bring into the light what that is which his ethical philosophy decorates with the name of virtue, or brands with the name of crime:—"The man who does acts of justice and beneficence," —(that is, in the words of the same author, "acts which are useful to others in the first instance")—anticipates the favourable dispositions of mankind as their natural effect; and this association is his belief, or conviction, or sense (he calls it by all those names), of deserving the favourable sentiments of mankind. The man, on the other hand, who performs acts which are unjust and hurtful to others—(and, be it remembered here that, according to the same author, unjust acts *are* those which are hurtful to others in the first instance)— "anticipates the unfavourable and hostile sentiments of mankind, as the natural consequents of his acts; in other words, has the belief, or conviction, or sense (for the association in this case also has these various names), of deserving, not well, but ill, at the hands of other men." The import then which distinguishes this theory, is, that our conviction of deserving well or ill by our conduct, of "deserving" commendation or reproach, is significant of nothing really existing in our voluntary agency; but is strictly the effect of the favourable or unfavourable disposition excited by actions, by intentions, by volitions, useful or hurtful to society. On what evidence this is established, and the merit or demerit of mankind ascertained to be nullities, is yet to be considered.

hardly stop to remark or allow. If the ruling disposition for which we approve ourselves in a course of virtue, so called, turns out, on reflection, to be nothing more than the product of motives brought into being by the care and exertions of society to adapt the conduct of its members to its own security and advancement,—if we have made the discovery that that disposition is, strictly, a predominating desire to conciliate the favourable regard of the community, then is it far from being a deduction of reason that we are the subjects of a moral law, enjoined upon us by the Creator; and that we serve and obey him, as well as promote our personal welfare, by a mastery of the passions, and a pursuit of moral excellence. Society is making large and incessant demands, not on the virtues only, but also on the talents, of its members; and divers are the rewards which it holds out to stimulate their intellectual exertions; but, much as it may applaud the works of genius, and idolize the men who produce them, it were something new to conclude, that in yielding to such incentives to the cultivation of their peculiar powers, individuals were responding to the claim of the Creator upon them as voluntary agents, and earning a title to the peculiar favour of Heaven. If such be the source of our moral perceptions and feelings, it must be evident that God has left the practice of virtue, and the culture of the moral powers, to the same stimulus and support as he

has left the attainment of general knowledge, and the progress of science and the arts; to the spur of wants and the importunity of desires, which give no intimations of an authority over us higher than human, or of consequences beyond the present life. The defect of practical goodness among mankind is to be supplied, not by dwelling upon the supremacy of God and our absolute dependence on his power and beneficence, but by rendering individuals more keenly and continually alive to their dependence on their fellow-creatures, or to the sentiments of society towards them.

Now regarding this account of the sense of duty in its bearing on the credibility of Christianity, a fact has been adverted to of essential importance, namely, that it is the reverse of immediate and spontaneous; that it stands opposed to the ordinary apprehension; and is propounded as the result of a close inspection of the human mind, or a special inquiry into its laws and operations. This, we say, is a fact of essential importance; for otherwise there would have been an objection to Christianity, and one apparently insuperable, in the very existence of this theory. It was premised, in our first discourse, that if propositions, forming the ground-work of the Christian religion, be seriously maintainable in virtue of their conformity to our moral judgments, these judgments must convey that signification which Christianity annexes to them with a cor-

responding strength and universality of evidence: they must be easily and universally intelligible in that sense in which they are found to answer and corroborate the appeal made to them in the Scriptures. On the supposition that they were otherwise, that they were of dubious import or readily admitted of divers interpretations, it is in no degree probable that God would have called our attention to them as significant or confirmatory of his government over us; or as supplying ground for believing, with reference to any rule of conduct, that it was enjoined upon us by his authority, or with reference to any doctrines calculated to promote the observance of such precepts, that they were matter of divine communication. That this theory, then, so adverse to the principles of natural religion assumed in the Scripture, should obtain a measure of acceptance, is in itself far from being conclusive against their truth and reality; propounded, as it is, with a full admission that the notion of moral obligation to which it is opposed is naturally, and indeed unavoidably, suggested to the understanding, as well as commonly prevalent among mankind. Our concern then is merely with the evidence on which this theory is supposed to be established, and we accordingly proceed to inquire in what manner its advocates have explained, and endeavoured to confute, that notion of moral obligation which, as they must confess, is most powerfully

pressed upon our attention by its force and prevalency in the human mind, and, as we conceive, so impressively corroborative of the principles of human duty inculcated in the Scripture.

But here we must first observe, that the notion of moral obligation which by far the major portion of mankind actually entertain, is greatly more prevalent, and deeply-seated, and strictly contradictory to the theory in question, than its advocates appear to be aware. When, for example, we insist that that satisfaction which is the fruit of upright conduct, and that remorse which is the consequence of crime, are felt in a degree and under circumstances which would be unaccountable if this theory were true,—in what manner do they answer the objection? By alleging that such feelings are the result of *religion*, not of morality. The answer proves them to be imperfectly apprized of the extent and tenacity of that specific conception of virtue which they are labouring to supplant. It is true, such feelings are, *immediately*, the effect of our religious apprehensions; but if our religious apprehensions—if our belief that God takes judicial cognizance of our actions be, itself, originated or sustained by a persuasion that we approve our conduct, or judge it to be right in its own nature, irrespective of the demands and sanctions of society, the satisfaction and remorse alluded to bear testimony to the depth and fixedness of this particular per-

suasion; and it follows, not that such feelings are the growth of religion in distinction from morality, but that they result from a view of morality essentially different from that which this theory propounds and undertakes to establish. Our idea of the Deity as the Governor and Judge of mankind is, precisely, that idea of him which grows up under and is nourished by a conviction that our moral judgments are caused by a difference in actions themselves, and not by the effects which they are known to produce upon the feelings and conduct of the community towards the agent; and, speaking generally, we may safely affirm, that inasmuch as persons are actuated in their conduct towards their fellow-creatures by a regard to the authority of God, they are fully possessed with this conviction; nay more, that, to most reflective persons, this conviction is held to be essential to support the belief of a religious obligation to virtue. Why otherwise, indeed, should writers on ethics who assert the fallacy of this conviction be commonly suspected, whether correctly or not, of attempts to undermine the belief of our accountableness to the Deity, and to dissipate the idea of a future retribution?

But it may be said, let the conviction that actions are right and wrong, in themselves considered, be ever so general and tenacious, and likewise apt to excite or coalesce with our belief

of God's dominion over us as moral agents, the supposition is not inadmissible that such a conviction may rest upon no foundation in the nature of things; may be altogether an illusion; and one completely accounted for by the theory in question. Undoubtedly the supposition, however foreign or apparently irreconcilable to the views and feelings of mankind in general, may be allowed. But we have not to deal with a supposition merely; the supposition is presumed to be verified by facts, to be established on evidence. We proceed to inquire by what facts, by what evidence? We are looking, it will be observed, at that persuasion which has taken hold upon mankind for the most part that, in their conduct, one to another, they are under a moral obligation to abstain from some actions, and to perform others, which is incumbent upon them in virtue of the constitution of their nature; an obligation, therefore, which it is perfectly consistent society, mankind collectively, should recognise and enforce; but which it did not, properly speaking, create; and which it recognises and enforces in its instrumentality to the designs of that Being, who is as certainly the Founder of human society as he is the Creator of the world. In this persuasion it is that they experience a peculiar satisfaction in the practice of the right, which associated and blended, as it is, with the pleasurable assurance that they have obtained, or may expect to obtain,

the commendation and favour of society, is derived from another source—derived from principles in the human mind which it pertains to a state of society to call forth, to nourish, and mature; but which society no more originates, than it originates the natural inclinations and passions of individuals, or their intellectual powers,—no more than it creates those elements of our nature, out of which it is itself formed, and by which it subsists. It lies then upon the advocates of the theory under discussion, to explain in what manner this persuasion is generated in the human mind, if, as they maintain, there is no foundation for it in the nature of things.

Now, they are not here compelled to have recourse to vague and general affirmations, touching the association of ideas or the power of habit, nor have they any reason or pretext, so far as we can judge, to assign any particular process of the mind which it would be difficult, even to reflecting persons, and would require their own metaphysical acumen, and power of mental analysis, to trace and comprehend. That specific operation of habit which they must suppose to have taken place, and to have superinduced the conviction of which we are speaking, is illustrated by numerous and well-known examples. Few facts are more familiar to observers of human nature than this:—we are led to presume an *intrinsic* value in things which, at first, were objects of desire only

because we perceived them to be instrumental to the attainment of something farther; and also that, in a similar manner, we are brought to experience a pleasure and satisfaction in the mere *performance* of actions which, in the first instance, were regarded as steps to ulterior advantage, and were occasions of pleasure and satisfaction only by exciting the hope and expectation of some future good. To take an example no less apposite to the question before us than it is familiar to general observation—men are urged to the pursuit of gain as the means of subsistence or of procuring accommodations and luxuries without number; but how much of the love of wealth actually prevailing in the world may be perceived to exist independently of those powerful inducements to obtain it, and to extend no farther than the act or occupation itself of acquiring and amassing treasure. To the miser, the realized value of riches is precisely of this nature. We perceive the same operation of habit in the attainment of languages. These are held to be properly desirable as the medium of acquainting ourselves with the minds of men of other nations and ages, or of establishing an intercommunity of ideas with some other portion of our species; but the ardent and successful study of a language is universally found to create a gratification in the act itself, of learning and remembering the meaning of terms and phrases; a gratification

which, in some instances, is even allowed to predominate over the original desire of knowledge, as well as the disposition to impart information to others. We perceive it also and remarkably exemplified in the observance of the outward forms of religion. These are properly instrumental to a spirit of devotion, and to practical religion; it is concluded, we presume, by the most intelligent believers of Christianity that such forms have been instituted expressly for this reason, and that otherwise the spirit of piety would have been left to its own spontaneous expressions. Notwithstanding, we are confessedly prone to rest in the forms of religion themselves; to find contentment in the appointed means of religious improvement; in a comparative indifference to the effects which they actually produce on the heart and conduct. Now, if the theory under examination be correct, a similar process must have taken place in the formation of the moral judgments. The known undeniable fact, that mankind experience a pleasure in the performance itself of actions denominated virtuous, or derive a peculiar satisfaction merely from the consciousness of performing them, must be one of a large number of instances, in which that which was necessary or desirable as a means to an end, is raised into an object of independent importance, and ultimate regard.

The preference of virtue, for its own sake, as

it is called, is superinduced upon the mind by its being habitually regarded and practised as the necessary and certain means of avoiding the hatred and opposition of society, and of engaging the regard and favour of our fellow-creatures; just as the love of wealth, for its own sake, is superinduced by those natural wants and importunate wishes which wealth is essential to satisfy, and the indulgence of which is allowed, in a rational estimation, to constitute the real use and worth of riches. That such is the cause of an apparently original and independent obligation to the practice of virtue, is a supposition which, of course, may be allowably made, and, in some points of view, may assume a certain appearance of probability. What motives or desires, it may be asked, are more actually coercive, on the one hand, or more effectually alluring and persuasive, on the other, as well as more incessant and abiding, than those which are here presumed to deter men from vice, and to attract them to virtue? Is the pressure of want itself more urgent or prevailing than the dread of infamy? Or are there any pleasures more highly appreciated than the mental luxury of praise and adulation? Can you wonder, it may be asked, can you demur to allow, that desires so powerful and so constant should invest those rules of conduct, which they operate to enforce, with the authority ascribed to the dictates of the con-

science,—an authority apparently underived and self-existent, unchanging and supreme,—should stamp a seemingly intrinsic and enduring worth on those actions, by means of which such desires obtain their repose and satisfaction?[1]

[1] It is satisfactory to know that this *is* the particular process of habit and association to which our deceptive idea of the merit or demerit of our own conduct, with the pleasurable or painful feelings attending it, is attributed. "It is," Mr. Mill observes, "a matter of common and constant experience, that we have associations of painful consequences with the idea of the unfavourable disposition of our fellow-creatures,—associations which constitute some of the most painful feelings of our nature. This it is which is commonly expressed by the terms—loss of reputation, loss of character, disgrace, infamy. In some instances the association rises to that remarkable case, which we have had frequent occasions of observing, when the means become a more important object than the end, the cause than the effect." (P. 248.)

In reference to the alleged *supremacy* of the conscience, the author of the Discourse on Ethics (p. 11) inquires—"What is there in this claim put forth by the moral sentiment to supremacy and command, which does not inevitably follow from that origin here assigned to it? A sentiment imposed on us from without, by the voice of parents, neighbours, society—restraining oftentimes our strongest propensities—how can it fail to have an air of authority, and authority of a very different *kind* from the desires it controls? What else is it but a command? What but domination? We may reject its control; we may cavil at its sentence; we may refuse to be governed; but we cannot make it other than a command, a governing power—it is this or nothing." Specious and imposing—but a bold arrogation this to society, of the supremacy claimed for the conscience—considering how much in the moral life passes under the review of conscience, of which, in the *conviction of the self-approving or self-condemning mind*, society will never

We shall answer such a question by proposing another. Why do mankind in general admit the reality of such a process of the mind in the examples adverted to, and alleged to be analogous to the present? Why do they allow that the worth supposed to inhere in riches, or the pleasure experienced in simply acquiring and accumulating them, is derived and secondary? Do they admit this in virtue of an antecedent probability, or merely because there are certain laws of association in the mind, the effect of which is to lend to objects an apparently inherent character, which in reality does not belong to them, and is entirely reflected upon them from some other quarter? No; they admit it because they retrace such a process in this particular instance; and that they do retrace it is made evident in the consequence which follows—they discern an intrinsic worth in wealth no longer. So, in other instances, they do not merely hear, or read, or regard as possible or very likely, that an object apt to be considered intrinsically valuable is actually not so—they are

be cognizant; and how much, besides, which, though society may know, it is, if not careless to applaud and recompense, yet powerless to punish or to censure, being itself tried and found guilty at the very tribunal which this author maintains to be its own. However, it must in all candour be allowed to *him*, that he is determined mankind shall suffer no diminution in their virtue, from their adoption of his theory on ethics, if it be in his power to prevent it.

convinced it is not so by their own reflections. They abstract the object from the benefits which it serves to procure, and with which it is closely associated in their habitual apprehension, and they perceive, with the eyes of their own understanding, that it is this association which gives it an illusive appearance of intrinsic worth, and independent existence. The consequence is, that however the illusion may recur, and whatever hold it may occasionally take upon their feelings, they are deliberately certain that it *is* an illusion. Now, if they who assert that the supposed approvableness of virtue, for its own sake, is completely explained by those important particular uses which are ascribed to it in the theory under consideration,—if they have contemplated virtue specifically, apart from those uses, and perceived it, in consequence, to be divested of every attribute commanding approbation and esteem, and to become indifferent to their moral perceptions and feelings, just as wealth is perceived to be of no worth, or undeserving of its name, when regarded otherwise than as the means of procuring the accommodations and luxuries of life,—we have nothing to reply, and must withdraw from the controversy, however it may surprise us, that the result of their reflections upon virtue should be so essentially different from that of our own. But we would press them with the question, whether they have

ascertained this result? in other words, whether they have actually tried and proved their theory by its conformity with their own experience and consciousness? We protest against receiving a theory in explanation of phenomena in the moral world, any more than in the natural world, merely because it is proposed—and proposed with whatever plausibility or likelihood—before it has been made specifically evident to the understanding. When a substance, long regarded as a simple one, is affirmed to be a compound body, the affirmation is not believed, at least by those who are engaged in resolving compound bodies, till it has been proved, more or less directly, to the senses; and this, notwithstanding it may be alleged that a number of substances as apparently simple, and formerly judged to be so, have been discovered to be otherwise. The idea of moral rectitude has been long, and is still generally, held to be one of an essentially peculiar nature. It is affirmed, however, to be the product of others, with no one of which it appears to have affinity. We submit that the assertion be verified, by the only test which can be applied to such assertions—the reflection of the mind itself on its own operations. The truth, we suspect, is, that the application of such a test to their own theory, is among the last things which engage the attention of its supporters. In disputing a proper reality in moral

distinctions, they appear to be chiefly occupied in considering, not *what* they perceive of moral qualities in themselves and others, but *how* they perceive them, or may be supposed to perceive them; not in using the organ of moral vision, so to speak, but in speculating on its form and structure. At least, by their own admission, the idea of an actual personal desert of praise or blame, reward or punishment, retains a powerful influence on the understanding, in spite of the alleged detection of its fallacy; and in contemplating the "virtues" and "vices" of mankind, they are continually surprised with emotions of admiration at the former, and disgust at the latter, which seem inconsistent with their speculative views of human agency in the department of morals. What then we would insist upon is, the necessity of a proper and decisive proof of such a fallacy in the natural prevailing view of moral obligation:—bearing in mind the consideration which was urged in our first discourse, as preliminary to the discussion of our subject, that it is the very spontaneousness and tenacity of our perceptions of a personal worthiness or delinquency in our conduct, which render them credible and impressive tokens of the will of God, and of his moral supremacy over us, and, consequently, matter of solemn concernment with reference to the especial claims of Christianity.[1]

[1] Pp. 20—25.

In conclusion, there is one admonition which it is strictly our duty to offer to any who may have embraced the theory of ethics in question, or, rather, to any who may be engaged in the investigation of its principles; since the adoption of it leads in general, we do not say always, to a rejection of our accountableness to the Supreme Being, and a secret contempt of all practical religion. That admonition is, that in examining and deciding upon the principles of morality, in their presumed connexion with the duties of religion, they regard themselves as personally and, it may be, deeply concerned in the result of the examination; inasmuch, we mean, as their discernment of the truth may depend upon the actual use of their own powers of intelligence—that is, upon their own solicitude and endeavours to ascertain the real constitution of their nature as moral agents. The admonition, moreover, is *immediately* needful, for the moral principles, as well as other powers and susceptibilities of the human mind, require, for their due development, a sufficient exercise and their appropriate nurture; and there is no surer way of weakening their power, than by undervaluing their character and importance; no surer way of frustrating any efficacy which may belong to them as monitions of religious duty, than by setting out in our career of life with despising them. Let it be considered, then, that the man who questions his accountableness

to God, is either accountable to God or not *at the period of his questioning it.* The conditions of his moral agency are not suspended while he is pondering that question, and will not be in abeyance till he has determined it. We are not assuming that he *is* accountable in the consideration of that question for the use of his faculties concerning it; the sceptic, we are aware, has here brought us into a position, in which we cannot assert his duty to God in any degree whatsoever, whether in the use of his reason, or of any external possession. But, on the other hand, it is premised that he *may* be accountable; and this while the question is pending whether he be so or not. What then is most of all needed on his part, is such a measure of personal interest in the ascertainment of the truth as may stimulate and enable him to find it: for he must be aware, that the defence of a theory, or the conduct of an argument, in regard to this subject as well as others, is far from implying, of necessity, a concern and effort to discover truth. We have presumed, then, that he believes the existence of God, and, consequently, that he cannot but believe his utter dependence upon him. What we would urge then is, that he should entertain this consideration; that he should reflect, again and again, that his well-being may be dependent, to an extent which he cannot limit, on his conformity to the will and

purpose of God in that constitution of his nature which is here the subject of dispute and inquiry. The consideration cannot be otherwise than supremely proper, the question involving, expressly, the consequences which may be expected to flow from our conduct in relation to the Deity. We know that some are satisfied to look upon man as little else than a very credulous creature with regard to religion; as swayed almost entirely by his hopes and fears; the sport of imagination; the prey of superstition. Hence they conclude that in forming his conceptions of the Creator, he has been guided by his first impressions, and accepted such analogies as happened at once to present themselves; likening him, in consequence, to a monarch among men; describing him as enthroned in the heavens, as attended with a retinue of superior beings, and as owning the world for his empire. But whatever be attributed to the credulity of man, or however we may choose to account for his religious apprehensions, it appears unquestionable that, so far as it is matter of doubt or inquiry whether we be subject to the moral government of God, it behoves us to consider well that his favour towards us, and consequently our personal and enduring welfare, *may* be essentially dependent on our actual endeavour to learn his will. The importance of some powerful motive, operating as an adequate

stimulus to the faculties in the search and perception of truth, is pressed upon our attention by obvious undeniable facts, and the lessons of daily experience; and no reason, we are sure, can be assigned why such a motive should be superfluous, and not imperatively needful, for the elicitation of truth in the inquiry before us—needful for promoting a correct apprehension of our experience as moral agents, and even for disclosing the latent convictions of our own minds. How powerfully our reflections on God and futurity are actually calculated to bring out to our view the characters of a law which he has enjoined upon us, holy, just, and good; and to convince us of its reality, as well as to lay open its extent—how far such reflections operate to extinguish our doubts on this head, and to put our scepticism to confusion, multitudes could testify. Is this the effect of fear *only*—or simply a dread of the power of God? Can fear convince a man that he is guilty and deserving of punishment? Is nothing *else* required to constrain him to admit the reasonableness of the precepts enjoined in the Scripture, or the justice of its accusation against him? Even if in some instances this were credible, still a due consideration of the consequences, which may flow from the use of our own faculties on this momentous question, cannot be otherwise than most consistent and necessary. A spirit of levity or a

state of indifference is here, most evidently and in the extreme, irrational, if there be any ground for the question itself.—For let it be added for the consideration of us all, that if to approve and disapprove our own actions, to dictate the path of duty and to pass judgment on our conduct, instead of being a mode of thinking brought about as this theory supposes, be a proper independent function of the mind, it must assuredly merit all that has ever been affirmed of its pre-eminence and authority. The claims of the conscience must be supreme; and every one may at once conclude that he is without excuse in disregarding its dictates; and that if he thereby plunge himself into misery, here or hereafter, he cannot look for consolation in his own mind. There can be no excuse for disobeying rightful absolute authority: there can be no solace in suffering the consequence of such disobedience. It is a conclusion that admits of no question, and allows of no qualification, that "he that walketh uprightly walketh surely."[1]

[1] The explanation given in the theory which we have discussed, of our idea of a personal merit or demerit, is a critical point in an inquiry into the foundation of morals, and it may not be useless to add a few remarks corroborative, as we apprehend, of its strictly hypothetical character, or of the deficiency of actual proof in its favour. Let it again be considered that the advocates of this theory,—Mr. Mill, for example,—in explaining the notion of "praiseworthiness," does not allege an opera-

tion of the mind which, though we may not be conscious of its taking place, is notwithstanding presumed to be inferrible from known laws of the mind; as, for instance, the operation of memory in every act of perception by the senses. He accounts for this notion of "praiseworthiness" or "blameworthiness" by a process of association, the reality of which is, in numerous instances, made evident to our own reflections. Every particular idea which Mr. Mill brings forward as the result of this process, with a view to resolve and dissipate the idea of praiseworthiness, is *perceived to be* the result of this process by all who are accustomed to reflect upon the operations of their own mind. He adduces, for instance, as "a remarkable exemplification of a high degree of association" the love of posthumous fame; and that the reader may fully appreciate the cogency of his reasoning, we shall give in his own words, first, the example itself, and, afterwards, his application of it to the solution of the idea of praiseworthiness. "Not only," he observes, "that praise of us which is diffused in our lives, and from which agreeable consequences may arise to us, is delightful, by the associated ideas of the pleasures resulting from it; but that praise which we are never to hear, which will be diffused only when we are dead, and from which no actual effects can ever accrue to us, is often an object of intense affection, and acts as one of the most powerful motives in our nature. The habit which we form, in the case of immediate praise, of associating the idea of pleasurable consequences to ourselves, is so strong, that the idea of pleasurable consequences to ourselves becomes altogether inseparable from the idea of our praise. It is one of those cases in which the one idea never can exist without the other. The belief thus engendered, is of course encountered immediately by other belief that we shall be incapable of profiting by any consequences which posthumous fame can produce: as the fear, that is, the belief of ghosts, in a man passing through a churchyard at midnight, may be immediately encountered by his settled, habitual belief that ghosts have no existence; and yet his terror not only remains for a time, but is constantly renewed, as often as he is placed in circumstances with which

he has been accustomed to associate the existence of ghosts." —P. 246.

Now, manifestly, the idea of those agreeable consequences of praise which cannot accrue to us when dead—to which idea, exclusively, Mr. Mill attributes "the intense affection" for posthumous fame—is simply one of those numerous instances in which we imagine ourselves to be subject, after death, to pleasures or pains which must necessarily terminate with our lives. It is essentially the same idea under the influence of which most persons are interested in some degree, and not a few very deeply, in the disposal of their remains—the lifeless and perishing effigy which death will leave of them. It is the same idea under the power and fascination of which we mourn the decease of friends and relatives not only on our own account, but on *theirs*, and are affected with a train of sympathetic ideas described so truly by Adam Smith in his Theory of Moral Sentiments. But instances are unnecessary of this particular illusion—the difficulty of separating, in our thoughts, the sentient, conscious being from the hitherto known conditions of its existence. What we are solicitous should be considered is, that the idea, or, as Mr. Mill terms it also, the "belief" that we shall, after death, experience those pleasurable consequences of praise which must cease with our life, is *perceived to be* an illusive idea or belief, and the feelings consequent upon it are accordingly perceived to have no foundation in reality. The result is, that in Mr. Mill's own words, "the belief engendered" by the process of associations "is encountered by a settled habitual belief of an opposite description." It is so in the other instances, to which we have alluded as essentially similar in their nature. If then our idea of praiseworthiness be a result of the same process, is it not reasonable to conclude that this idea also will be perceived to be illusive, and be, consequently, "encountered by a settled habitual belief" of a contrary nature? We shall now, then, give Mr. Mills's application of his example, and we submit that it be ascertained whether his elucidation of our idea of praiseworthiness admit of a similar confirmation, by inducing a perception of the illusive character of that belief. "The

same considerations," he observes, "account for that remarkable phenomenon of our nature, eloquently described, but not explained, by Adam Smith, that, in minds happily trained, the love of praiseworthiness, the dread of blameworthiness, is a stronger feeling than the love of actual praise, the dread of actual blame. It is one of those cases, in which, by the power of the associations, the secondary feeling becomes more powerful than the primary. In all men, the idea of praise, as consequent, is associated with the idea of certain acts of theirs, as antecedent; the idea of blame, as consequent, with the idea of certain acts of theirs, as antecedent. This association constitutes what we call the feeling, or notion, or sentiment, or idea (for it goes by all those names) of praiseworthiness and blameworthiness." (P. 249.) To some, and probably to many, this account of the idea in question may be new and unthought of, and accordingly require their close attention to appreciate its nature and merits. But if, as we believe, by far the larger number who read this statement of Mr. Mill's, will, after reflecting again and again on the pleasurable and painful consequences of praise and dispraise, together with the effects produced by these consequences upon the habitual current of their thoughts and feelings, be equally as percipient as before of a personal "desert" of praise and dispraise in themselves and others, and as satisfied as before that that desert is the cause of praise and dispraise, and not the praise and dispraise the cause of the "idea" of that desert; which, we ask, is the more probable conclusion—that Mr. Mill's explanation of the idea of praiseworthiness is correct, or that he has been led to conclude that a known process of association accounts for this particular idea, on no better ground than that it accounts for many others. Mr. Mill, in allusion to Mr. Alison, as the author of a "very pleasing, and, to a certain degree, a philosophical book, on the Emotions of Taste," remarks that "he has shown, by an abundance of well-chosen illustrations, that it is not the immediate sensations, received by us from the objects of taste, which constitute them a cause of our pleasures;" but he expresses surprise that Mr. Alison, "exhibiting, as he did, a clear conviction of the wonderful effects of association in one instance, seems to have had no

idea of its affording an equally satisfactory solution of the other complex phenomena of mind.—Now it is true and undisputed, however opinions may differ as to the extent to which Mr. Alison has carried his theory, that he has illustrated it as Mr. Mill remarks, by an abundance of well-chosen illustrations; but these, be it observed, surprised and delighted the readers of his work, not by their novelty only, but by their truth: the "wonderful effects of association" were verified to their own reflex intelligence—a pretty good proof that they had been previously verified to the author's. We submit, then it will be time to qualify our praise of Mr. Alison, as a great illustrator of the principle of association, when Mr. Mill's application of this principle shall have called up a similar witness to its truth in the mind of the reflecting community; that is, when it shall have been, not supposed and affirmed only, but actually found, to "afford an equally satisfactory solution of the other complex phenomena of mind." At present, Mr. Mill, in the first place, exhibits as "a remarkable phenomenon of our nature," an idea or belief, which, to the mass of mankind, is quite the reverse; for, let it not be forgotten, the belief of praiseworthiness can be a remarkable phenomenon to none but those who do not believe that praiseworthiness exists. It is the advocates of the theory under discussion who propose this "belief" as a thing requiring explanation; and if it be a remarkable phenomenon, it is they who have discovered it to be one. But, secondly, having exhibited this "belief" as a remarkable phenomenon, he refers it to a cause which, we may safely affirm, his readers, for the most part, consider essentially inadequate to produce it. We are not opposing an opinion because it is held by the few against the many; our argument against it is this:—nothing is more certainly known of a particular process of association, than that the ideas which it produces are, by the "many" among reflecting minds, perceived to be its production; that process, however, is alleged to account for the idea of praiseworthiness, though, in this instance, the well-known proof of its reality is absent—the "many" among reflecting minds do *not* perceive the idea of praiseworthiness to be its production.

Sir James Mackintosh, indeed, concludes that the process

of association in question has taken place among our ideas and feelings at a period antecedent to "the age of attention and recollection;" for example, in the formation of the principle of benevolence. But this, it need hardly be observed, is a far "higher" degree of association than entered into the views of Mr. Mill, in his solution of the belief of praiseworthiness. Moreover, as we have elsewhere observed, operations of the mind which cannot be submitted to our attention afford us no light, and are as darkness itself, in reference to the great practical questions under discussion in these discourses. Whether then the process described by Sir James Mackintosh be capable of verification or not, it were apart from our purpose to inquire; but we cannot assent to its reality in the example alluded to, that of benevolence; and the instance is so important that we shall state, very briefly, our objection to his argument. Speaking of "avarice and other factitious passions," he observes:—"Few will be found to suppose that these are original principles of human nature, because the process by which they are generated, being subsequent to the age of attention and recollection, may be brought home to the understanding of all men." He afterwards observes:—"As soon as the mind becomes familiar with the frequent case of the man who first pursued money to purchase pleasure, but at last, when he becomes a miser, loves his hoard better than all that it could purchase, and sacrifices all pleasures for its increase, we are prepared to admit that, by a like process, the affections, when they are fixed on the happiness of others as their ultimate object, without any reflection on self, may not only be perfectly detached from self-regard or private desires, but may subdue these, and every other antagonist which can stand in their way. As the miser loves money for its own sake, so may the benevolent man delight in the well-being of his fellows. His good-will becomes as disinterested as if it had been implanted and underived." (P. 255.) Now, in our apprehension, the premises here taken by Sir James should have conducted him to a very different conclusion. If avarice has been discovered to be a secondary passion, or the growth of associated thoughts and feelings, by the exercise of attention and recol-

lection, that discovery prepares us to admit benevolence to be so by directing us to make this affection also a subject of attention and recollection. But if, as Sir J. Mackintosh implies, such a discovery with regard to benevolence "cannot be brought home to the understanding by attention and recollection," the example of avarice, we apprehend, prepares us not to admit, but to reject, his opinion, that "as the miser loves money for its own sake, so may the benevolent delight in the well-being of his fellows." Our author expects us to admit benevolence to be a derived and secondary principle because avarice is such a principle, although he himself apprizes us that the very proof of a secondary nature in the latter is unavoidably wanting in the former. The ingenious manner in which he traces the growth of benevolence from its infancy upwards, need not be particularly noticed: our objection is, that, in assigning a common parentage to the philanthropist and the miser, he cites a precedent in our nature which fails in an essential particular, and that, so far, his opinion is purely conjectural. Bishop Butler maintained that benevolence was an original principle of our nature, "whose object and end was the good of another," and this conclusion he applied his own great powers of reflection to bring home to the attention and recollection of those who were disposed to doubt it, or if not disposed to doubt it, yet not themselves well able to defend it. We do not perceive that the argument of the celebrated author of the "Dissertation on the Progress of Ethics"—that is, that the case of avarice—supersedes or unsettles this conclusion. Indeed, we apprehend, his reasoning in general on the principle of association is exceedingly hypothetical, and an exceptionable feature in that admirable work; and we will say thus much—that his allusions to external nature are worded in such a manner, and so pressed upon the consideration of his readers, as to raise a suspicion, to say the least, that "chemical combination," "transition states," and "tertiary formations," &c., supplied him with more than figurative illustrations of his opinion; that they suggested the opinion itself; and furnished material to support it. (Our quotations, it should have been stated, are from his work, as edited by Professor Whewell.)

LECTURE VI.

THE CHRISTIAN EXPOSITION OF OUR DUTIES.

Matt. vii. 12.

THEREFORE ALL THINGS WHATSOEVER YE WOULD THAT MEN SHOULD DO TO YOU, DO YE EVEN SO TO THEM.

HAVING brought under some examination, in the last discourse, that particular view or theory of morals, which, if true, would disprove the reality of our accountableness to the Creator, so far as it may be gathered from the constitution of our nature, we now return to the point at which, reserving that theory for a separate consideration, we had previously arrived. We had, then, endeavoured to establish the reasonableness of Christianity in its assumption of these two positions;—first, that we are subject to a moral obligation to the Deity; and, secondly, that our duty to God dictates the fulfilment of our duties towards our fellow-creatures, as an exemplification of obedience to himself. Our design in selecting the general subject under discussion,

was, principally, to engage attention to the truth of these fundamental principles of religion; under a persuasion, as was stated at the outset, that of those who dispute the responsibility of man in reference to his religious belief, there are not a few who either reject these principles altogether, or entertain but a superficial impression of their truth.

Indeed these principles are of so imperative a character, and lead, as we have seen, to consequences so important, that, prior to experience, it were scarcely credible that any who really assented to them, with some adequate comprehension of their import, would be satisfied to proceed no farther, and not be solicitous to obtain a more particular knowledge of their relations towards the Creator; a clear apprehension of the duties which they owed him, and the true foundation of hope and confidence towards him. The Christian religion, however, not only enforces these fundamental principles of religion as though they were perfectly conformable to human reason, but professes, on the express authority of God, to apply and illustrate them in a number of particular commands and prohibitions, which it enjoins for the particular regulation of our conduct: thus submitting its pretensions to as severe an examination as it is, strictly, in the province of human reason to institute. In a discussion, then, the object of

which is to maintain the credibility of the Christian religion, in its appeal to our intelligence as moral agents, it appears incumbent to apply some attention to that particular exposition of our duties which it has laid before us; with a view to estimate the presumption offered us that it is, as it purports to be, of divine authority. The strength of this presumption will be made to appear, if we consider the only real and sufficient test, by which we are qualified to judge of the internal evidence of a particular religion, considered in its preceptive character or as a rule of conduct to its professors; and bear in mind the manner in which Christianity, both absolutely, and comparatively with other religions, sustains that test.

This religion takes for granted, we have seen, in concurrence with a prevailing apprehension of mankind, that our duty towards the Supreme Being is deducible from our duty towards our fellow-creatures. It follows, that if this religion be a divine institution, it can inculcate nothing as a duty to the Creator incompatible with our duties one towards another. Our duty to the Divine Being is indisputably paramount; but we are regarding the Christian religion in its pretensions to declare what that duty is; to particularize what it implies and comprehends. Agreeably to its own assumption, as we have said, the sense of duty to a fellow-creature is

properly initiatory to the sense of duty to the Supreme Being. Accordingly, if Christianity be a divine institution, it cannot publish, as a commandment from God, one which would supersede or encroach upon the duty of man to man. It cannot be subversive of itself. It cannot, in the first place, appeal to a law of rectitude in proof of our moral obligation to God, and, notwithstanding, lay injunctions upon us which would abrogate the authority of that law, or, in any measure, obstruct its fulfilment. Moreover, as we had occasion to remark in a former discourse, inasmuch as that which commends the exercise of gratitude to the Creator, is, precisely, the fact that he has formed us to discern a moral rectitude in that affection intrinsically, as it is entertained towards a human benefactor, it is a deduction of our reason—one entirely recognized in the general avowed design of Christianity—that if the Deity should interpose, in some extraordinary manner, to assert his claim to the gratitude of his creatures, such an interposition would be, virtually, a special declaration of his love of all rectitude, and his determination to promote it; both in the regulation of their affections towards himself, and towards their fellow-men. We must immediately infer, then, that a religion instituted by the Deity would teach a morality of a perfectly pure and most comprehensive character, as well as enforce it

by especial sanctions; would be conspicuously distinguished by its tendency to promote the discharge of every social and relative obligation. No conclusion of our reason is more peremptory than this; none so effective to lay open the internal evidence of Christianity, and exhibit the probability of its divine origin. That a particular religion demands our devotion, demands our reverence, our adoration, nay, our humility and resignation towards the Deity, is no distinction or peculiarity. Every religion demands the exercise of such affections towards the Being whom it professes to reveal, as the author of creation, and, consequently, the supreme object of worship and obedience. It is the manner in which such affections are tried and exercised by the precepts which it enjoins for the guidance of our conduct, that we perceive its distinctive character, and learn whether it bears an affinity to that Being who, in the constitution of our nature, has marked his approval and preference of the right, and is adapted to prepare us for that happiness in a future state which it befits such a Being to bestow. It is in the law which it promulges for the control and discipline of our passions, that we contemplate, as in a mirror, the character which it ascribes to the Deity, and may, consequently, determine whether it would attract our affections to the "living" and "true" God, or fix them upon a god existing only in

human imagination. And here an important consideration suggests itself, which should not be passed unnoticed, with respect to rites of worship, or the special ordinances of religion. These are justly regarded as means of expressing, and thereby strengthening and confirming, our religious affections; and consequently, if it be a presumption of reason, as we have argued, that the Deity, in demanding our affections to himself, demands, at the same time, the cultivation of upright affections towards our fellow-creatures, it must follow, with reference to particular religious ordinances, that the intrinsic probability of their appointment by God, and not by man, is made apparent by nothing so much as their ostensible tendency, their declared intention, to pledge us more deeply to the fulfilment of our duties one towards another, and to inspire a new ardour in the pursuit of moral excellence. It need but be intimated that the correspondence of Christianity with this inference of reason is perfect, and above all question; the Scriptures uniformly admonishing us that no rites of worship, no offerings at the altar of God, shall meet with his acceptance, unless presented by a heart pure from deceit and malice, and sustained by a life of justice and benevolence.

The question here presents itself, How is this test of the credibility of a religion, considered in its preceptive character, to be applied with

particularity? How shall it be brought into contact, so to speak, with each separate command and prohibition of Christianity? The answer to this question, it will readily be perceived, must depend upon the opinion entertained as to the principle, or principles, which constitute virtue, or moral rectitude. We have disputed, in a former discourse, that theory of moral rectitude which resolves it into a principle of universal benevolence; but we opposed it no farther than as it implies an objection to the assumption of Christianity, that the duty of gratitude to God is a reasonable inference from the duty of gratitude to man. In this point of view, however, we were led to remark its very arbitrary and purely hypothetical character. At the present stage of our discussion, we shall take occasion to observe that such is its character generally, as an explanation of the moral judgments. In the acceptance given to this theory of virtue, we may readily detect the same error of philosophy to which, as we have argued, there is ground to attribute the adoption of that ethical philosophy which was the subject of the preceding discourse:—the error of omitting to compare the hypothesis with the results of reflection on the actual experience of our own minds. In *one* respect, indeed, the theory now in question is the less supported, of the two, by its conformity to the ideas and feelings of which mankind are

actually conscious. That right actions so termed procure for us the general commendation and goodwill of those with whom we associate, and that wrong actions expose us to their reproach and aversion, is a difference which forces itself upon our attention at the dawn of reason; is at once and powerfully influential upon our particular conduct, and continues to be so to the end of life. On the contrary, that the former actions tend to augment, and the latter to diminish, the happiness of society, is a difference which can scarcely be said to engage our consideration in early life; and, though matter of common remark, is rarely found to affect the ethical views and speculations of individuals, till their virtues or their vices have become habitual, and their character is substantially formed. That this is not that difference in actions which furnishes the mind with its perception of moral distinctions, need only be stated; and yet it is in the face of this capital objection in the constitution of the mind itself, that the general tendency of actions is proposed as a test of their moral quality; besides the objection, so repeatedly and unanswerably alleged, that its application as a guide of conduct would be attended with peculiar difficulties, and rather endanger than improve the common security and welfare.[1]

[1] Even, however, when these facts appear to be fully admitted—namely, that it is not the general beneficial tendency

There are forcible reasons, it is true, regarded alone and exclusively, why the resolution of all

of actions which gives rise to the idea of virtue, or supplies the actual motive to virtuous conduct, there is still a disposition to retain it as a *test* of virtue. Sir James Mackintosh in particular, though keenly alive to the "unfitness" of beneficial tendency as an immediate incentive and guide to right action, contends for its "value as a test." Without here attempting any adequate discussion of his opinion, we may allege some valid ground for demurring to receive it. In his strictures on the argument of Dr. Brown against "utility" as the criterion of virtue, he remarks, that it follows from the concessions of that author, "that beneficial tendency is at least one constant property of virtue," and afterwards observes:—"Let us not be assailed by arguments which leave untouched its value as a test, and are in truth directed only against its fitness as an immediate incentive and guide of right action. To those who contend for its use in the latter character, it must be left to defend so untenable a position. But all others must regard as pure sophistry arguments which really show nothing more than its acknowledged unfitness to be a motive," (p. 357.) Now, we submit that Sir J. Mackintosh has here made an admission, or rather laid down a position, as to the "unfitness" of "beneficial tendency," without allowing its legitimate consequences—an admission which is of more essential and comprehensive purport than he actually assigns to it. In common acceptation the virtue of an action is the virtue of the motive, the disposition from which it springs; and it is so, most expressly, in the view of this author, (p. 198.) If, then, as he states, a regard to the beneficial tendency of actions, that is, a disposition to promote the general happiness, be unfit as an immediate incentive and guide to right action, does he not in effect admit that this is not *the* test of virtue? (It is observable that he says *a* test, as if he were under the influence of "that sort of reluctance and fluctuation," which he has just ascribed to Brown in the use of the word "perhaps.") The virtue of an action is in the mind of the agent; it can certainly exist nowhere else,

moral rectitude into a principle of general benevolence, should be favourably received and

though we explore the universe in search of it; and if a regard to beneficial tendency be not essential to virtue, and even unfit as a present motive and guide of right action, then "beneficial tendency" may indeed be a constant property of virtuous actions, but it cannot be that property which discovers and proves them to be virtuous. The object of applying a test, let it be observed, is to learn something relating to the thing to be tested. With respect, for instance, to a portion of matter, you wish to ascertain whether a particular substance has entered into its composition; you apply a test which will detect its presence by some known invariable effect of that substance, which it is its "property" to produce. But is it not implied, in the passage cited from the author, that the actions, to which he proposes to apply a test of the presence of virtue, are already known to possess virtue? The virtue of actions is present in the idea or contemplation, as well as realized in the conduct, of the agent without the perception of their beneficial tendency; it is ascertained by their property of raising a moral approbation in regarding them. This is in reality that criterion of virtue which Sir J. Mackintosh presumes to have been already applied, when he predicates "beneficial tendency" of "virtuous" actions—actions already known to be virtuous and bearing that name.—But, farther, whatever be the sources of error in our judgment of the moral quality of particular actions, they cannot be obviated by the adoption of the test of virtue which he proposes, since, as he expressly states, they who contend for "beneficial tendency" as an immediate motive and guide to right action, maintain "an untenable position." Yet if ever a test of virtue is wanted, it is surely where men intent upon doing what is right are, notwithstanding, in doubt as to what they ought to do. A man, for example, is under a personal obligation to an individual whose integrity, however, he has become convinced it would be dangerous to rely upon. At one moment he may consider it his duty to make no secret of this conviction, and, in a

reluctantly surrendered, by the virtuous mind. For what is the antagonist principle, with which

manner, to warn the public respecting him; and at another he considers he ought to be grateful—that he ought to act in such a way as to be beneficial to the individual who has done him a service rather than to the public. He becomes however apprized, or strongly suspicious, that a person is actually in danger of suffering from the duplicity of the individual to whom he is indebted—he weighs the question whether he shall not disclose his own knowledge of his character. Now in such an instance,—in all instances in which men are called to determine between apparently, to themselves, conflicting claims of duty, they cannot, according to Sir J. Mackintosh, be fitly actuated or guided by a regard to the "beneficial tendency" of their conduct. Yet he insists upon the "value" of "beneficial tendency" as a test. We repeat that the admission which he makes in the passage we have cited is of larger scope than he appears aware; and, we suspect, that in endeavouring to effect a compromise between contending systems of ethics, he loses sight of a primary distinction between them.

We are aware, indeed, that the general beneficial tendency of actions must at all times form a prominent subject of ethical inquiry and discussion. This cannot but be evident when we consider the numerous instances in which our conduct is morally dictated by the relations we sustain, the duties we owe, not to one or more particular individuals, but to society at large; that is, to all the individuals who compose the community of which we are members; and, especially, when we consider the extent to which human agency is controlled by laws and institutions, the object of which is specifically to vindicate the rights of every member of the community, and to promote the general welfare. In tracing the consequences of actions as they extend, and insinuate, and ramify through the whole society, there will doubtless be abundant occupation for the human intellect; as there must needs be a wide sphere for the practice of public virtue; more especially for those who bear the responsibility of official power. And here

we have chiefly to contend, in the practice of virtue, but the spirit of selfishness, betraying itself in an insensibility to the *claims* of others, when their *interests* are brought into collision with our own? What is so essential to animate the sense of duty towards our fellow-creatures, and to incline us to acknowledge and vindicate their rights, as a readiness to promote their welfare? And how can the rights of individuals be correctly understood, unless we regard them as they are modified by a condition of society?

we are reminded of an observation of Dr. Brown, which appears to throw no little light on the origin of the doctrine of utility in morals. After remarking that "the independent pre-established relation of virtue to utility has rendered less apparent the error of the theory that would reduce moral approbation itself to the perception of this mere usefulness," he proceeds:—"And the illusion has certainly been aided, in a great degree, by the reference to the public advantage, in the enactment of laws, and the discussion of national measures of external or internal policy. These measures, to be virtuous, must indeed always have the public good in immediate view, because the legislative and executive functions of the state are either expressly or virtually trusts for this very purpose; and a neglect of the public good in those who exercise such functions has, therefore, all the guilt of a breach of trust in addition to any other partial delinquencies that may have been added to the crime. It is not very wonderful, however, that we should thus learn to extend to all particular actions, what is true of those actions of general delegated power, which are the great subjects of temporary debate; and should erroneously suppose all men in their little sphere to be swayed, when they are virtuous, by the motives which alone we recognise as giving virtue to the actions of legislators, judges or sovereigns,—

Moreover, what is the commanding aim of virtue, in the consciousness of superior power and resources, but to relieve the wants, and better the condition of others? And how can this be surely and permanently effected but by regarding them in their relation to the community of which they are members, and consulting for all society? Nevertheless, we may be quite sure that this principle is inadequate to explain morality, or to comprise all human

those actions about which all men speak, and which furnish so much nice casuistry to the political discourse of every day." Lect. lxxviii.

It should be added, that the opinion of Sir J. Mackintosh appears to have been, in a great measure, an inference from the benevolence of the Deity. It could hardly have been suggested by the constitution of our own nature; observing, as he does, that the constitution and circumstances of human nature render it unfit or impossible to pursue the general happiness *directly* as the object of life. But he adds:—"As soon as we conceive the sublime idea of a Being who not only foresees, but commands, all the consequences of the actions of voluntary agents, this scheme of reasoning appears far more clear. In such a case, if our moral sentiments remain the same, they compel us to attribute his whole government of the world to benevolence." Of this argument, as the basis or support of an ethical theory, we have taken some notice in a previous note (p. 123); and we need but cite his own most just and impressive conclusion:—"The laws prescribed by a benevolent Being to his creatures, must necessarily be founded on the principle of promoting their happiness. It would be singular indeed, if the proofs of the goodness of God, legible in every part of nature, should not, above all others, be most discoverable and conspicuous in the beneficial tendency of his moral laws. (P. 359.)

virtue; and if farther proof of this be wanting, we need but look at that diversity in the external circumstances of individuals, which every where meets the eye; that manifest inequality in their comparative means of comfort and enjoyment. Such a condition of society, we shall presume, is not repugnant to the desire of universal happiness; not a malevolent, not a selfish, not an immoral condition of society. But what renders it otherwise? What can account for our moral approbation of such a condition of society? What but that it recognises and embodies that principle, in the universal law of equity, which prompts an individual to assert a right of property, limited and qualified, but not annulled, by society, a property in the fruit of his personal industry and skill; and which bids his fellow-men concede it to him?—a claim of equity which it is possible you might contrive to satisfy in some other manner than by the present composition of society; but which you could never bring a human being, strictly speaking, to renounce, or conceive that you had renounced yourself, but under a mistaken apprehension of the principle on which you had acted. You might destroy the distinction between the rich and the poor; you might collect all the materials of subsistence and comfort, which human labour could furnish, into one common fund, and distribute them in equal shares to every

member of the social body; but what could have induced, and what could induce, individuals to consent to such a change and remodelling of society? What but the conclusion, whether true or false, that, on the whole, weighing the liability of individuals, in the pursuit of gain, to adversity and misadventure, against the possibility of acquiring riches by their personal ability, or a favourable contingency of events, it were wise to prefer a sure though a smaller share of the produce of labour, to the capability and chance of a very much larger, with the hazard of becoming actually destitute and extremely miserable? And, farther, in trying the sufficiency of benevolence to illustrate all human virtue, we might call upon it to explain itself—to make out its own title to a moral approbation in the absence of any ownership in the good which it communicates, —ownership which it is in justice entitled to assert, and which others are morally bound to respect. But we have already dwelt on this topic at an undue length, and must proceed with the subject more immediately before us.

Having disputed, for important reasons, the opinion that virtue is reducible to a principle of general benevolence, we should not, in judging whether any particular precept of Christianity had been enjoined by divine authority, immediately inquire whether it tended, on the whole, to advance the happiness of the

community. We conclude that the practice of virtue consists in the fulfilment of a law, whose direct and immediate object is to regulate the conduct of individuals towards each other; and which dictates the exercise not of one disposition only, but of several, according to the particular relations existing between them. That law—referred to in the precept, Do unto others as you would they should do unto you—is not made out and decyphered from a calculation of the general consequences of actions, but, as we have before remarked, discovers itself to the understanding at so early a period, and is so naturally appealed to by all mankind in their transactions one with another, that they have even described it as innate, or originally engraven on the heart. That law, however, in making known its existence and authority, binds an individual habitually to survey his position with reference to his fellow-creatures, with a view to discriminate the particular duties which arise out of his various relations towards them; forecasting the consequences of his actions, remote as well as immediate, in order to fulfil them. It is a law capable, in the exercise of an adequate intelligence, of an indefinitely diversified application to human conduct, whether we regard individuals in the relations which they sustain to each other, or to the whole community; and, accordingly, it is not more clearly acknowledged in the intercourse and

transactions between individuals, than it is traceable in the foundation and arrangements of society.

But though we reject the opinion that virtue is comprehended in a principle of general benevolence—from which it would follow that the moral character of Christianity, and so far the probability of its divine origin, should be determined to the conscientious inquirer strictly by the tendency of its particular precepts to advance the happiness of the community—we entirely admit, and indeed maintain, that a religion of divine institution would be distinguished by its beneficial operation on the present condition of mankind, and directly tend to augment to our species at large that happiness which the world is constituted to afford them.

That, speaking *generally*, that conduct which is morally approved, or judged to be right and virtuous, is extensively instrumental to the happiness of the community, need not be formally argued; for this is not a point in dispute, and is never called into question. Inquirers into the principles of morals differ as to the ground on which actions are judged to be right; and they differ also as to the motives by which individuals are actuated in performing such actions; but they are substantially agreed that actions which mankind have united to approve, and have distinguished by the name of virtue, are of vital importance, and inestimably beneficial, to the interests of society.

If it were otherwise—if virtuous actions, so called, were not useful to society, whence could have sprung the opinion that it is their utility which actually renders them virtuous? With reference, indeed, to the individual himself who practises virtue, if he ascribes to the conscience an absolute authority, it is necessarily implied that his happiness is mainly dependent on a faithful adherence to its dictates. He must be prepared, and is often compelled, to forego other sources of happiness for the consciousness of doing the right, and thereby securing the approbation and favour of God. But however he may himself occasionally suffer in the trial of his virtue, he is directly instrumental to the welfare of others, and habitually contributes to the amount of human happiness. For of how much misery is injustice essentially the cause—his concern is to commit none. Calculate, if possible, the increase of happiness that would accrue to mankind if no wrong were wilfully done, and every man received his due: it is the business of virtue to give to every one his due. Think for a moment of the dangers besetting men in their property and reputation, and of the wounds inflicted on their feelings, through the recklessness and ungoverned passions of their fellow-men. Think, especially, of the sting of treachery, and the sharp tooth of ingratitude. Think of the sufferings that might be spared to multitudes, if all were benevolent

as well as just in the common acceptation; in obedience to the great law of equity, which not more clearly bids us fulfil a contract with our neighbour, than relieve his wants, with the ability to do so; and to promote his welfare, consistently with an equal regard to our moral obligations in general. Every virtuous person, we say, is a minister of good to the community; not, however, because he is bound to prefer the advantage of others to his own; but in consequence of his obedience to the sense of duty, which he has chosen as his guide to happiness here and hereafter. Of course, with the advancement of individual virtue, there would be a proportionate augmentation of the common happiness, besides the comfort of a good conscience, in the present life.

The presumption, then, that a religion emanating from God would materially enhance the wellbeing of society, follows from that conclusion of our reason which has already been stated, namely, that the precepts of such a religion would exhibit a pure morality, as well as be attended with additional and special motives to obedience. And this presumption applies particularly to those laws and institutions of a public nature, the moral quality of which is collected strictly from the consequences which they produce to the whole community, including essentially, as must be immediately evident,

their effects upon the moral character of the individuals who compose it. So far as the Deity had interposed to establish, or expressly sanction, such institutions, these, it might well be presumed, would evince a prescience of the influence which they would be found to exert on the principles and habits of virtue, as well as on the sources in general of the common good. But, more than this—the presumption in question applies to the external ordinances of religion, which bind the conscience in the belief of their positive institution by the Deity. The fact that actions which the Author of our nature has formed us to approve, and thereby signified his will that we should perform, are characterised by a tendency to promote our temporal welfare, renders it exceedingly improbable that, in claiming the worship due to himself, he would engage our sense of duty in such a manner, or in such offices of religion, as would impoverish our earthly state, and inflict discomfort and privation on his creatures. On the whole, then, if we make the supposition that a people were instructed in a particular religion, and that their conscientious observance of its precepts and institutions, instead of being attended with a proportionate increase, was marked by a diminution, of that happiness which the constitution of nature was adapted to afford them, what would be the reasonable conclusion? Assuredly, that with

the disposition to obey the will of God they had wanted a sufficient intelligence to guide them; and had either embraced a religion which was purely a human invention, or, receiving a religion of divine authority, had fallen into some gross *misconception* of its nature. The supposition, it must be evident, were dishonourable to the wisdom and benevolence of the Creator, that he would exact from his creatures a sacrifice of present enjoyment unnecessary to their rectitude of character, and enduring happiness. Undoubtedly our especial duty to God—the exercise of the religious affections in habitual converse with their Supreme Object, demands, no less than our duty to our neighbour, a firm control and moderation of the appetites in general, a "temperance in all things;" but need we stop to remark that such moderation is actually conducive to our present welfare, as though this had not been taught by moralists and philosophers of Heathen as well as Christian times?[1]

[1] It will occur to the reader that, in this important respect, Christianity, as taught in the Scriptures and understood by Protestants, is in perfect conformity with reason. But it is not enough to say that its institutions are not prejudicial to the physical comfort and welfare of mankind: its great institution, the *Sabbath*, appreciated and observed in a manner consistent with the elder intelligence of the Christian dispensation, as distinguished from the Jewish—(an intelligence which regards expressly its *spiritual* uses, and to these attaches the highest value)—is, in *all* respects and without question, a singularly benignant institution.

But we must proceed to offer a few observations on the manner in which Christianity sustains the proper test of its credibility, as a particular declaration of the will of God, and corresponds to the anticipations of reason. A religion, it was observed, which should inculcate or allow a principle of conduct repugnant to the law of equity appealed to in the precept, "Do unto others as ye would they should do unto you," would betray itself to be the offspring of enthusiasm or imposture. In a former series of discourses, we insisted on the opposition which has grown up in the world between religion and morality, in the prevalence of a spirit of persecution, and the singular excellence of Christianity in opposing itself to this peculiar form of iniquity: the example is here too apposite to be passed unnoticed. If the Christian religion allowed a spirit of intolerance, or sanctioned the use of force, in the propagation of its doctrines, there would be an irreparable chasm in the evidence of its divine authority; for, independently of other objections, the use of force for such a purpose is as certainly a gross infraction of the law of equity, as it is hostile to the peace and welfare of society. If the conduct of Christians in this respect, in past ages, had exhibited a true portraiture of the religion they professed, the unbeliever who, as the matter stands, alleges that conduct to so little purpose, would have been

furnished with an argument, than which it were impossible to supply a stronger against the divinity of its origin. But no such noxious principle lurks in the teaching of Christianity. In this, as in all other instances, that religion stands upon the foundations of moral truth, and breathes the spirit of universal justice. And let it be kept in view that the improvement of the public opinion, in this respect as well as others, is not attributable to any important modification or refinement which Christianity itself, as taught in the Scriptures, may be supposed to have undergone in the advancement of general intelligence;—as though its principles had been sifted by a discriminating philosophy, and, so far as they were conducive to the morals and wellbeing of society, had been preserved, and, so far as they were prejudicial or indifferent, had been thrown away;—but attributable to the fact, that a superior degree of intelligence has brought with it a better capacity to comprehend the purport of Christianity itself, and to appreciate its attributes and value. The supposition, indeed, that the Christian religion had been subjected to any such expurgation or refinement through the progress of the human intellect, would be wholly inconsistent with the belief of its divine authority. In estimating the credibility of a religion, morals are not to be identified with physics. Whether the sun moved round the

earth, or the earth round the sun; whether living creatures had subsisted on the globe which we inhabit, previously to that creation of the world which is recorded in the book of Genesis;—these are a sort of questions upon which, to say the least, it was not important to mankind to be furnished with particular information, in writings penned for their instruction in piety and virtue; but that a religion taught by God himself, and making its appeal, as Christianity so manifestly does, to the dictates of the conscience in the announcement of its precepts, should foster one unjust depraving principle of conduct;—nay, that such a religion should not bear upon its front the characters of moral excellence and perfection, is not to be endured. But then, this is a test of the credibility of a religion, as severe as it is imperative; and how unequal to sustain it was the religion prevailing in the world at the period when Christianity made its appearance, has been abundantly proved, and can here only be matter of allusion. When we consider, however, the vices which have been cloaked, and even nurtured and honoured, by the *religious* faith of mankind, the religion of the Gospel, we apprehend, stands alone in its moral character, and it is hard to determine whether its negative or its positive merits preponderate.

It is clearly a deduction of reason, that the morality inculcated in a religion of divine insti-

tution would not only contain no false and corrupting precept, but would be distinguished by the purity and comprehensiveness of its principles. In what particular manner the Christian morality realizes this internal evidence of a divine original, it would be altogether impracticable in these limits to discuss. The *fact* itself, however, is so completely established to the conviction of most readers of the Scriptures, that if they allege an objection to the precepts of Christ and his apostles, it is that they exhibit a standard of morality above their power, or the power of human nature, to attain; not observing the important distinction between the duties which Christianity inculcates, and the conditions which it annexes to the bestowment of future happiness; nor reflecting that a religion would be essentially defective as a scheme of moral reformation, and want the very mark of credibility in question, if it in anywise sanctioned an imperfect discipline of the passions; and did not contemplate the highest degree of personal rectitude, the nearest approximation to perfect virtue, of which our nature was capable. Judging, then, from the impression which Christianity is found to make upon the moral sentiments of mankind in general, its incomparable and perfect morality—the intrinsic probability that it is, as it purports to be, a divinely authorized rule of duty, appears to be placed above question: and the few excep-

tions which have been formally made to it, by particular individuals, have been repeatedly shown to be founded on an inadequate application of its principles, or a construction of language more literal than is warranted by the custom of speech.[1]

[1] It is alleged that patriotism is omitted in the Christian virtues, but this objection is hardly worthy of notice; as though a man who fulfilled his duties as enjoined in the Gospel, his duties as the member of a family, as a citizen, and a subject, were not already imbued with the spirit of a patriot. So far, indeed, as "patriotism" may be supposed to be otherwise nourished, its omission is honourable to Christianity, and comes under that distinction of the Christian morality stated by Paley, in his admirable condensation of the argument of Soame Jenyns, in which he explains the precepts relating to forbearance and the forgiveness of injuries. (*Evidences*, part ii. ch. 11.) With reference, however, to this feature of the Christian morality, it seems due to our argument to observe, that the precepts enjoining forbearance under injury and provocation, are not commended to our obedience only, or chiefly, because that disposition is an essential element of social happiness. They appeal, in the first place, to a sense of justice one towards another; for who amongst us is not liable to offend, and, morally, in need of forgiveness? But, secondly, a spirit of forbearance and concession is powerfully influential on the better feelings of the offender, and conducive to his compunction and amendment; and this is an instance which appears to illustrate, in an eminent degree, the inseparable connexion between religion and morality, or the necessity of both to complete the idea of moral rectitude. For on what principle, independently of a religious obligation, persons who are themselves careful to do no wrong to others, should account it their duty to practise forbearance towards those who are not so, and to carry it to the utmost limits which their duty in other respects will allow, is far from being readily evident, notwith-

An objection, notwithstanding, may seem to be conveyed against the morality of the Gospel, by the fact that some of its opponents have adopted, and are active in maintaining, a particular criterion of virtue—that of general utility—other than that which is applied by mankind in general to the habitual regulation of their conduct, and which, as we have seen, is assumed and proceeded upon in the injunctions of Scripture. That a religion of divine institution would be productive of greatly beneficial consequences to the present condition of mankind, is deducible, we have argued, from an unquestionable result of human experience in general—namely, that such conduct as man is formed to approve as right and virtuous, is necessary, and abundantly conducive, to the happiness of mankind at large. So much stress, however, is laid upon general

standing a spirit of forbearance may be especially needful to *their* moral improvement. But regarding virtue to be conformable to the will of God, the highest pitch of self-denial manifestly becomes a duty, if instrumental to promote it. In the Gospel this severe effort of virtue is enjoined upon us with a most impressive consistency, and in a manner evidently intended to affect and satisfy the sense of equity. It is required from us not as though it were dictated by our duty to our neighbour, as though this itself and alone could bind us to such an effort of virtue; not as though men who violate the acknowledged law of equity retain intact their claim to its protection; but as an act of gratitude to the Deity for his transcendent goodness towards us; a concurrence in his purpose, and imitation of his example, in the exercise of pure benevolence.

expediency or utility as the criterion of virtue, by individuals either manifestly hostile to Christianity or unconcerned in its diffusion, that it appears to be believed, and, if we are not mistaken, intended to be insinuated against this religion, that it clashes with the desire of the common weal and prosperity, and is the reverse of useful and auspicious to society. Now if such an objection can be proved against the Christian morality, it must apply especially to its more peculiar and distinctive attributes; to those precepts in which it differed most from the received morality of mankind, and sought to rectify and enlarge their apprehension of moral rectitude, or the extent of human duties. Undoubtedly, the morality of the Heathen taught, or accounted virtuous, a course of life which must be pronounced, in Christian estimation, to have been materially defective. It did not expressly teach that diffusive and inextinguishable benevolence which the Gospel enjoins —that benevolence which extends itself beyond the community to which we belong, and to every individual of our species; and which not only places a check on the proneness to anger, and the desire of retaliation, but even renders the man who has suffered an injury capable of seeking the welfare of the man who inflicted it. Moreover, that morality differed from the Christian, inasmuch as it held in inferior esteem an

institution which binds the sexes in indissoluble ties. Are the individuals, then, to whom we have adverted, prepared to maintain that the morality of the Gospel is inimical to the interests of society, because it has innovated, in these important particulars, on the morals of antiquity? Does their regard to the happiness of society incline them to retain the spirit of revenge, or to dread the prevalence of a disposition to mutual forbearance and concession? Or do they conceive that a vagrant licentiousness would correct the disorders of the social system, and elevate the moral character of our species? But where, then, is this implied discrepancy between the course of life enjoined by the Christian religion, and that which would be dictated by a regard to the general and progressive happiness of mankind? Surely, if they who despise or undervalue the Gospel, and revere utility as the basis of morals, would but task themselves to particularize those rules of morality, which are necessary to illustrate and carry into effect their favourite principle, and compare them with the precepts of Christianity, they would find themselves effectually witnesses to the worth and excellence of the latter. At least, we are warranted in this opinion by the testimony which has been undesignedly borne to the general utility of the Christian precepts, by authors who are either known to have disbe-

lieved Christianity, or who are never classed among its advocates.[1]

Apart from that imputation which appears to be cast upon Christianity in the manner we have stated, and inasmuch as the idea of a superior happiness to our species in the present state is inseparably associated, in most minds, with the hope and prospect of their growing virtues, the religion of the Gospel, in its preceptive character, is fully commensurate to the deliberate presumptions of our reason, and substantiates our highest

[1] Volney is an eminent instance. In his "Law of Nature," he defines virtue to be the practice of actions which are useful to the individual and society; and sin, according to the law of nature, to be "whatever tends to disturb the order established by nature for the preservation and perfectibility of man and society;" and the rules of virtue which he deduces from his leading position are remarkably coincident with the precepts of the Gospel, (in the *letter* we mean,) relative to the control of the appetites, and our conduct towards our neighbour. The law of nature, as he explains it, dictates a high degree of self-denial in general, and extends to the government of the *thoughts*; it dictates forgiveness of injuries so far as consistent with self-preservation, which, in his view, the precepts of Christianity preclude. He is not, it may be supposed, unwilling to exhibit a difference between his interpretation of the law of nature, and the moral rules of the Gospel, but this willingness to differ is more apparent than the difference itself; and, on the whole, it is a considerable testimony undesignedly borne to the perfect harmony of the Christian precepts with a prudential regard to "the preservation and perfectibility of man and society."

The work of Mr. Combe, "The Constitution of Man consi-

conceptions of a law of rectitude promulgated by the Deity to mankind. Enjoining, as the main purpose of our life, the faithful discharge of every social and relative duty, and commending its precepts to our observance by motives which religion only can supply, it promises to enhance the wellbeing of mankind in the present world to an extent incalculable, and in ways without number. It lays open to our moral speculations, to our hopes of human happiness, a prospect that cannot but enkindle and delight our best affections. We contemplate the Christian religion

dered in Relation to External Objects," is written in a very different manner from that of a disbeliever of Christianity; and far be it from us to impute a sceptical purpose to an author who is concerned to disclaim it. At the same time, any testimony which he may bear to the worth of Christianity is apart from the main object of his work, and must be allowed to be at least independent and impartial. In his "introductory remarks," he observes :—" To the best of my knowledge, there is not one practical result of the natural laws expounded in the subsequent pages, which does not harmonize precisely with the moral precepts of the New Testament. . . . It is my purpose to show, that the rewards and punishments of human actions are infinitely more complete, certain, and efficacious, in this life, than is generally believed; but by no means to interfere with the sanctions to virtue afforded by the prospect of a future retribution."

We have in nowise referred, on this topic, to those who have made the discovery, as they allege, of a " new " moral world. Of course we can argue only from the results of experience in the world heretofore and now existing to the moral perceptions of mankind; a world which happily yields the promise of a " new " creation, but one " wherein dwelleth righteousness."

as the agent of a great moral reformation in the world; as laying an effective restraint upon every vicious passion, and opposing itself to every form of crime; imparting life and strength to every virtuous principle in the human mind; ameliorating the character, and ensuring the efficacy, of human laws and institutions for the governance and peace of society; diffusing a love of equity, a spirit of mutual forbearance and "brotherly kindness," among all orders of men, and in every vicissitude of life; and even placing a curb on the aggressive spirit of a people, abashing and subduing the spirit of war and conquest, and linking nations in the fraternal bonds of justice. So manifest is the proper tendency of Christianity to improve the peace, and harmony, and general happiness of society, and so attractive is the idea of its realization in the practical efficacy and progress of its principles, that Christians need be guarded lest they allow the advantages which their religion promises to confer upon mankind in the present world, to obtain that ascendency in their views and expectations, which properly appertains to the happiness which it holds out to them in a future state —a far higher and more efficient motive for obedience to its precepts. Nothing can be more decisive as to the favourable aspect of Christianity to the present world—but so it is—when we look forward to the full success and preva-

lency of our religion, and behold all human virtues springing up and expanding themselves under its light and influence, producing their healing and precious fruits in endless variety and profusion, and the life of man, which must else have been as "the wilderness, and the solitary place," made "glad" for them, the "desert rejoicing and blossoming as the rose,"—gazing and expatiating upon a prospect so rich and diversified, we incline to be content and satisfied with the terrestrial paradise which our fancy has created, and grow in a manner forgetful of the scenes which lie beyond it, and indifferent to a farther sight into futurity; making but little effort to ascend that sublime and glorious height, to which the hand of faith is pointing us, though that height commands eternity—regions of unclouded radiance, unfading verdure, stretching interminably before us.

In the conclusion of this argument in support of the credibility of the Christian religion, we may be met with a question of which it may be proper to take some notice:—Suppose, it may be asked, Christianity were deficient in the internal moral evidence which you ascribe to it, what would you reply to the evidence of miracles alleged to have been wrought in its attestation? We answer, let such a case be first affirmed and proved to exist, and it will then be fit we should regard it. But we are not called to believe or

defend Christianity on a state of evidence which is purely imaginary, and has no existence. The case itself is one of the most arbitrary character that can be conceived; one which is scarcely credible; namely, that Christianity should teach a false morality, and yet have been attested by miracles; or rather that evidence should be offered that miracles had been wrought, in proof of its divine institution, so close and convincing as that which is alleged of the reality of the miracles of Christ and his apostles. But, as we have said, let the case be shown to exist; our duty is with things as they are.[1]

One thing, however, is certain. If such were actually the case, the rejection of Christianity would be a determination and state of the mind essentially different from what it is. A man would not be subject to the misgiving and accusation of his conscience, in demanding additional and even irresistible evidence of the truth of the Gospel. For *probable* evidence, as is often

[1] But who would not admit the truth as well as the energy of the following?—"And surely it is not too much to say, that those moral principles (though they may derive fresh sanction from miracles), are such as no miraculous evidence can overthrow. If a teacher were one hour to raise the dead, and the next hour were to propose, on the strength of that wonder, a scheme of faith and practice which should confound the landmarks of good and evil, who can doubt that we should be fully justified in disregarding his miracles, and in rejecting his doctrine? The only proper reply to him would be—'Get thee behind me, Satan!'"—*Le Bas on Miracles*, p. 45.

remarked and should be seriously considered, is that on which we are formed and habituated to act in relation to our fellow-creatures, and the business of the present world. It supplies the universal and sufficient stimulus to human conduct: it feeds the lamp of hope, and sustains and nourishes our active powers; and inasmuch as we are, proverbially, prone to forestall and exaggerate the evidence in support of such statements and propositions as are agreeable to our inclinations, or as we wish to be true, there is, clearly, a sufficient reason why we should suspect ourselves of disaffection to a law which the conscience recognises to be holy, just, and good—of aversion to the rule of life which Christianity inculcates, if we demand still farther and more decisive, if not overpowering, evidence of the truth of the Gospel; and can account even the testimony which has been borne to the resurrection of Christ from the grave, insufficient to establish its divine authority, although it would assure us that we ourselves shall outlive the dissolution of these bodies, and obtain everlasting happiness. It is, precisely, the intrinsic moral truth in the Scripture which grounds the argument for self-distrust and examination in dealing with the evidence of its truth. It is because the Gospel is corroborated by the testimony of his conscience, that the Christian, in receiving and availing himself of such evidence

of its truth as it is his wont and nature to act upon in the general pursuits of life, may justly conclude that he yields himself to the special commandment of his Creator, and is actuated by a disposition to obey his will.

LECTURE VII.

CREDIBILITY OF MIRACLES.

2 *Tim.* iii. 16.

ALL SCRIPTURE IS GIVEN BY INSPIRATION OF GOD, AND IS PROFITABLE FOR DOCTRINE, FOR REPROOF, FOR CORRECTION, FOR INSTRUCTION IN RIGHTEOUSNESS.

In the last discourse we considered the strong presumption which there is, from its intrinsic moral purity and excellence, that the particular exposition of our duties laid before us in the Christian religion is, as it purports to be, of divine authority. A topic so extremely important might well engage the whole of our attention in the space remaining for the prosecution of our subject; but, in regarding the claims of Christianity in its appeal to our reason as moral agents, there are other topics almost equally essential, as well as less repeated and familiar; and we proceed, as proposed at the commencement of our discussion, to direct attention to the

credibility of the Scripture as an account of miraculous interpositions of the Deity; inasmuch as the end for which they are recorded stands connected with those essential principles of religion, which have been brought under consideration as deducible from the constitution of our nature.

Of those who have sought to illustrate the operations of the human mind, and have applied the result of their reflections to the defence of the Christian religion, Dr. Hartley may be presumed to stand amongst the most distinguished. On the other hand, no author appears to have employed the subtilty of the metaphysician so effectually in the diffusion of a spirit of scepticism, or to have equally succeeded in undermining the belief of Christianity in curious and speculative minds, as Hume. The conclusions which these celebrated philosophers were led to form, in reference to the *internal* evidences of truth in the Scripture, were remarkably different; or, rather, in the utmost degree opposed to each other. Dr. Hartley maintained, not only that there were various internal indications of a divine revelation in the Scriptures, as well as marks of the veracity of their authors, but that these were entirely adequate to command a rational belief of the Christian religion. In maintaining the specific proposition, that "the excellence of the doctrine contained in the Scrip-

tures is an evidence of their divine authority," he makes this striking observation :—"It seems evident to me that, if there were no other book in the world besides the Bible, a man could not reasonably doubt of the truth of revealed religion."[1] Hume, on the contrary, as is well known, constructed an argument for the purpose of proving that a miracle was in itself incredible; that no human testimony could entitle it to belief. It were apart from our purpose to enter upon a formal examination of that argument; which, in our conviction, has met with ample as well as repeated refutation. It may be proper, however, to offer an observation on the concluding passage in his Essay on Miracles, which may not a little qualify the impression which it appears calculated to make on the mind of the reader. In that passage, to which it is here sufficient to advert, he proposes to confine our attention to the miracles related in the Pentateuch, "lest," as he says, "we should lose ourselves in too wide a field," and he remarks expressly that these miracles "are corroborated by no concurring testimony, and resemble those fabulous accounts which every nation gives of its origin." Now, what amount of truth, or the contrary, there may be in this assertion, we are not, on the present occasion, concerned to

[1] "Observations on Man." Part ii. "Truth of the Christian Religion," Prop. xxxv.

inquire; but why, we ask, should he have stated this particular at all, if, as he argued, "no human testimony could have such force as to prove a miracle?" It would appear that, after all, he was not without a secret apprehension that his absolute negation of a miracle might, under peculiar circumstances, be found to submit to a qualification. But, more especially, the faith which Christians place in the miracles recorded in the Old Testament, is powerfully supported by their belief of the miracles recorded in the NewTestament. Now, in corroboration of these, a concurring testimony is actually offered, whatever be its strength and sufficiency; and if it was needful or pertinent to remark that the former were not avouched by a concurring testimony, it was equally so to admit that the latter were. Why, then, were these omitted in winding up his argument, and collecting its weight on the mind of his reader? In other words, why did he have recourse to the arts of the mere disputant, if the position which he had taken was sufficiently secure and absolutely impregnable without them? That he had the miracles related in the New Testament in his view, when he was engaged in the construction of his argument, is evident; for, in a former part of his Essay, he *instances the restoration of a dead man to life*, as a miracle incapable of proof from any amount of testimony whatever.

But to return to the singular difference, the perfect contrariety, of opinion between two so distinguished philosophers, as to the verisimilitude of the facts related in the Scriptures. Its chief cause, we apprehend, may be readily discovered — they entertained essentially opposite views of the principles of morality, or the nature of virtue. Hartley so understood the moral judgments, or the distinction of right and wrong, as to infer that piety and virtue had a common root in our moral constitution. He regarded the determinations of the moral sense—so he entitles the moral faculty, or the human mind in its function of approving and condemning its own acts—as indicating the will of God, and authoritative upon us in virtue of our obligation to obey him. "The consideration," he observes, "of the infinite power, knowledge, and goodness of God,—of his holiness, justice, veracity, and mercy,—and of his being our Creator, Governor, Judge, and Father,—must inspire us with the highest love and reverence for him, and beget in us that tendency to comply with his will, which, according to the proper use of language, is called a sense of *duty, obligation*, of what we *ought* to do." "He must will that we should apply to him as we do to earthly superiors of the same character, purifying, however, and exalting our affections to the utmost; that we should be merciful, holy, just, &c. in imitation of

him, and because this is to concur with him in his great design of making all his creatures happy."[1] . . . "Natural religion," he elsewhere observes, "has independent evidences. We are certainly able to infer the existence and attributes of God, with our relation and duty to him, from the consideration of natural phenomena, and though our evidence here may not perhaps be demonstrative, it is certainly probable in the highest degree. Revealed religion," he proceeds, "has also independent evidences; both, however, receiving light and confirmation the one from the other; and this mutual confirmation is a still farther evidence for both."[2] Such is the strain of Hartley's reasoning, such the complexion of his thoughts.

The moral speculations of Hume, on the other hand, had conducted him to no such conclusions. In his view, there was no distinct, independent sense of duty, or judgment that actions were right and wrong. "The rules of equity and justice depend entirely on the particular state and condition in which men are placed, and owe their origin and existence to that utility which results to the public from their strict and regular observance." "The necessity of justice to the support of society is the *sole* foundation of that virtue. It is the *sole* source of the moral appro-

[1] Part ii. ch. i. prop. xii. [2] Part ii. ch. iv. prop. xiii.

bation paid to fidelity, veracity, integrity, and those other estimable and useful qualities and principles."[1] Our concern for the public he regards as not entirely resolvable into a concern for our personal security and welfare, but partly into a natural sympathy with the suffering and enjoyment of others. Sympathy, however, as we have before had occasion to observe, is subject to a moral regulation no less properly than inclinations distinguished as selfish, and may be equally hostile to justice and benevolence. Such an apprehension of virtue—which we need not further distinguish or particularize—can furnish no idea of moral obligation to the Creator, and appears to render an investigation of the Scriptures, which proceed on an opposite assumption, actually superfluous. It cannot inspire any sentiments towards the Creator responsive to such an appeal as is alleged to be addressed to us in those writings—sentiments rendering a declared revelation from himself an object of conscientious attention, of personal interest, of solicitous inquiry. Its *tendency* is to extinguish such sentiments altogether.

We can hardly want any farther solution of the otherwise extraordinary difference of opinion in question; and, if so, it is not without reason that, in connexion with our subject, we have

[1] Essays, Principles of Morals, sec. iii.

brought that difference under notice. Hartley was drawn to the study of the Christian religion by his conception of "duty" or "moral obligation," as described in the passage just cited from his works; and he was consequently concerned to investigate the various particular evidences of its truth, in which, as is manifest from his writings, he became profoundly versed. For he who concludes from the nature of the moral principles, that man is subject to the approving and condemning judgment of God, and is consequently affected with convincing proofs of a moral imperfection, or rather a deep degeneracy and exceeding guilt, before him, is essentially prepared to appreciate such an interposition in behalf of mankind as is ascribed to the Deity in the Scriptures, and to seek and entertain the evidence of its reality. Whatever questions may be otherwise suggested, as to the causes which might have operated to bring the human race into a state of moral defection and necessity, he cannot but observe, and be conscious of the fact, that a corrupt tendency, a moral evil, has entered into the human mind, and prevails more or less upon the will and affections of every individual; bringing man into strife and dissatisfaction with himself, and intercepting his converse with the Creator, whom he equally regards as the Governor and Judge of the world. He is self-convinced of a defect of that rectitude which is proper to his

nature; or adequate to meet the demand of his conscience, and to establish a valid ground of confidence towards God. Accordingly, as we have intimated, he is made acquainted with a *sufficient reason* for such an interposition of the Deity, in behalf of mankind, as is ascribed to him in the Scriptures. To him, therefore, there can be no difficulty in believing a miracle—the mere instrumentality by which the benignant design of the Almighty is alleged to have been made known—a means, strictly, of attesting his presence and agency in the actual execution of his purpose. He cannot surely doubt the possibility of such a means of carrying into effect his own design: he cannot conclude the Almighty to be subject to the laws, hemmed in by the barriers, of his own creation.

To one, on the contrary, who, like Hume, recognises no principle of duty to the Creator, and, consequently, no need or capacity of amendment, and no want of solace and encouragement in his concern and endeavour to obey him, the miracles recorded in the Scriptures can present themselves in no other light than as interruptions of an established order of nature, for no adequate purpose,—for no purpose whatever that a cultivated reason can acknowledge. Accordingly, that author describes the Pentateuch as "a book full of prodigies and miracles," as though it contained nothing else:

as though it made no mention of the delivery of a moral law to the Israelites, but only of the supernatural appearances with which it was attended, and no mention of peculiar religious rites and sanctions, intended to promote its fulfilment. The Scripture is nothing but a wonderful narration, or a series of wonderful narrations, relating events connected with no fundamental principles; no permanent institutions; no progressive scheme of divine wisdom and goodness for the religious instruction and enduring benefit of mankind; and, consequently, offering no better claims, we do not say to reception, but to examination, as a credible history, than the fictions of Heathen mythology, with which it is his manner to compare them. Accordingly, he encounters the Scripture with reasoning that would have been, not only subtle and ingenious, but pertinent and commanding, if the drift of the Bible, in its relation of miracles, had been to acquaint us that God had broken in upon the laws which he had originally impressed upon nature, or had deviated from the ordinary mode of his agency as the Preserver no less than the Creator of all things, for no other purpose than to create a surprise and astonishment among a portion of his creatures,—to amaze them with a succession of miraculous operations on the theatre of nature; and that it was precisely for the sake of conveying this information—of

acquainting succeeding generations with the miraculous exhibitions of divine power which had been witnessed by the people of Israel, that these had been collected into a continuous account of the procedure of Almighty God; to be preserved as a precious deposit, an inestimable treasure, of human knowledge. For aught we perceive, the argument of Hume against miracles proceeds upon no other and higher conception of the purport of the Scripture in relating them; and such a conception is so egregiously inadequate, or rather erroneous, that we hold his argument itself to be altogether inapplicable, and actually powerless. In constructing it he appears to have been so devoid of the principles of natural religion, or so entirely to have laid them aside, that he failed to apprehend the thing virtually proposed to our belief in the Scripture, and missed the question at issue between himself and the believer. He seems to have judged that the chief, if not the sole, intent of the Scripture, in relating a miracle, was to incline us to believe the miracle itself: as though, for example, we should receive its account of the deluge, in pursuance of the end for which it was recorded, if we believed that all mankind, with the exception of a few persons, were drowned by a preternatural outbreak of water: as though we should adequately believe its account of the destruction of the "cities of the plain," if we

simply give credit to its statement that their inhabitants were consumed by fire from heaven: —as though the fact intended to be placed on record in such instances was not the special agency of God as the great Foe and Punisher of iniquity, and the miracle was anything more than its attendant circumstance, or the particular mode of signalizing his retribution on the incorrigibly vicious and wicked. From such a construction of the import of the Scripture, in its relation of miracles, it would follow that if we received as true its assertion of the bare facts, and nothing more, that a man named Jesus was put to death, and restored to life again, we should satisfy the demand which it makes on our belief, in announcing the resurrection of the Son of God from the dead. Thus understood, it must be admitted, and we presume it would be generally agreed, that the miracles recorded in the Bible are, antecedently, devoid of probability; and we could scarcely impugn the philosophy that pronounces them to be incredible. If in setting out in our discussions respecting miracles, we put a negative on our *moral* relations to the Deity, and thereby assume, in effect, that the design which the Scripture attributes to the Deity, in endowing individuals with miraculous powers, is, itself, incongruous and incredible—a design to which the established order of sensible phenomena would be properly subordinate, and instead of

counteracting, would be directly instrumental to display and accomplish—what reason is there remaining, why we should examine any evidence that may be offered us of the truth of the Scripture as a record of miracles, and even allow the *supposition* of their reality? What otherwise can such miracles appear than *interruptions* of the order established in the universe—departures from the original plan of the creation—things contrary to human experience? Yet, after all, to what experience are they contrary? To the experience of mankind inasmuch as they are rationally constituted for a sense of duty to the Creator, and susceptible of corresponding wants and aspirations?—to that experience to which the Scripture directs our attention? No: they are contrary to our experience as inquirers into the merely physical laws of the creation—observers only of the succession of material phenomena!

It was not our purpose, as was stated, to enter upon a formal or particular examination of the argument of Hume on the question of miracles, still less to allege any other than an intrinsic moral probability that the miracles related in the Scriptures were actually wrought. But in calling attention to a most defective apprehension, as it appears to our judgment, of the true end and purport of the Scripture in its account of miracles, on the part of an acute

and subtle reasoner, and his want, in consequence, of the requisite qualification for tracing the characters of verisimilitude in its pages, we must remark, in general, the necessity, in a perusal of the Scripture, of keeping fully in our view those fundamental principles of religion which have been the subject of the preceding discourses. There are many who, although they would hardly reject such principles, nay, it is probable, would recoil from an imputation of utter scepticism in reference to the moral government of the Deity, or his judicial regard to our doings and character, yet, in perusing the Scriptures—documents professing to record the procedure of the Almighty towards mankind precisely in the relation which he bears to them as their moral Governor—allow such principles to escape from their reflections, and to fall almost into oblivion; and are, consequently, in no better preparation to appreciate the scope and credibility of a particular record of divine acts and dispensations, than the man who has actually repudiated the notion of a moral obligation to the Creator. In truth, we are generally more or less chargeable with a grievous inattention to acknowledged rudimental, but most pregnant, principles of religion, in our estimation of the Scriptures under that description in which we are now regarding them. We do not sufficiently recall such principles to our thoughts, and detain

them before the mind, in order that they may work their proper effect, in raising and stimulating the intellect to a correct and adequate comprehension of the claims which these writings prefer to our reception, as a history of "the ways of God to man." In our childhood and early youth, it was natural that we should believe such a history, if for no other reason, because we were told that it was true. It was equally natural that in the progress of experience we should entertain the question whether it was entitled to our belief; and, so far as it affected us merely with surprise and wonder, that we should be inclined to refer it to a fictitious origin. A personal inquiry, indeed, into the evidence of the Christian religion, is commonly found to produce an impression of its substantial truth; but, notwithstanding, we are apt to grow indifferent to the preternatural events recorded in the Scripture, rather than to acquire a commanding conviction of their reality. Nay, is there not often a considerable alloy of scepticism in our belief of these writings? May there not be some, even in this assembly, who, if challenged by one of superior intellectual pretensions to affirm their belief of the miraculous narrations in the Scriptures, would, instead of expressing a conviction of their truth, in language such as that in which the great philosopher referred to has recorded the result of his meditations on the subject, rather evade

the question than answer it; would be conscious of a secret diffidence and shame, and the dread of something in the shape of ridicule; would shrink from the avowal of their faith, and dishonour their profession, as Christians?

To what is this mixture of unbelief, this vacillation of judgment on the truth of Scripture, to be mainly attributed? Is it not to the fact that we look upon its accounts of miracles very much in the light in which Hume regarded them; that is, as accounts of "prodigies and miracles," and nothing more. As such we looked upon them in our early years, and as such we are prone to look upon them now, when inclined to doubt them. It is true we may reject the position of that author, that a miracle is incapable of proof from testimony; but that miracles are not, in themselves and of necessity, incredible, is one thing; that those related in the Scriptures are fully entitled to credence, is another. It is true, moreover, we may find these miracles, in particular, avouched by adequate evidence from historical testimony, and by most expressive marks of sincerity in the individuals who relate them. Still, an aspect of strangeness, and little else, remains upon the miracles themselves: their contrariety to experience continues to be their prominent feature and characteristic. There is no discovery, and succession of discoveries, of an intrinsic probability in the miraculous agency

itself alleged to have been put forth by the Deity; no ideas of fitness and consistency flowing into the mind as we contemplate the one continuous procedure ascribed to him, towards our species; qualifying and abating the feelings of wonder which it must otherwise awaken, and familiarizing us, in a manner, with the mind of that Being, whose agency and counsel it is which the Scripture purports to record and declare;—in a word, no lustre of truth breaking out from the several parts of its history, distinguishing and surrounding them. The reason is, as we have said, that we continue to regard the miracles related in the Scripture as little more than literal facts; giving a disproportionate or exclusive attention to the circumstantial detail of the history, instead of attaching our thoughts to that purpose of the Deity which the miracles only served to testify and illustrate. In other matters we may penetrate far beneath the outer form, and the mere surface, of things, and cultivate a philosophical habit of mind. But in reference to the miraculous narrations of Scripture, we have shaken off the credulity of our early years, while our early apprehensions of the narrations themselves may have undergone no proportionate enlargement, and may be hardly less superficial, and limited, and barren of matter for argument and reflection, than when they engaged out attention in our veriest youth;

stunted, moreover, by the influence of repetition and the power of habit;—as though it were not an incumbent duty, and manifestly reasonable, that we should contemplate anew such recorded manifestations of the Deity; with our matured intelligence, and in a manner corresponding to the present extent of our faculties. Meanwhile, however, we may have long outgrown our early and feeble conceptions of the works of human genius; and may be continually seeking to enter more fully into their import, and to sympathize more deeply with the minds of their authors.

To speak more particularly, when we take the Scripture-history into our hands, we admit the essential principles of religion—that it is our primary duty to obey God, and that obedience to him consists in the exercise of upright affections towards himself and our fellow-creatures; and surely our progress in the perception of religious as well as other truth, must materially depend upon a firm grasp of elementary principles, and an habitual readiness in applying them. Now, we cannot but know that the great presiding purpose attributed to the Deity in the Scriptures is to enthrone himself in the affections of mankind, and to attach them to his service in the habitual cultivation of piety and virtue, preparatory to an enduring life and happiness in a future state; and we cannot but perceive that such a purpose is infinitely worthy

of the Deity, and that to acquiesce and concur in promoting such a purpose, in the government of our own minds and the exertion of our influence on the minds of others, is an object which reduces every other to insignificance, and even annihilates it, in the comparison. We submit, then, that it is an exercise of mind equally reasonable and devout, in taking into our view and consideration the historical Scriptures, to attain and preserve a conception of that purpose of Almighty God corresponding, if it be possible, to its magnitude and importance. A continued reference to this ostensible design of God, as set forth in the Scripture, must have the effect of bringing the whole and every part of its miraculous history to the true and proper test of its intrinsic credibility; namely, the express adaptation of the procedure recorded of the Deity to carry out and realize the design ascribed to him; that of effecting the reformation of his accountable creatures, and restoring them to hope and confidence towards him. Of course, it must at once be perceived that, if it be unsound reasoning to deny the credibility of one miracle for such a purpose, there can be no reasonable objection to more than one, or to one miracle more than another, considered simply as a suspension of the ordinary course of nature; that incredulity on this head, if once abandoned, should be abandoned for ever; and that the only criteria of

internal probability in a miracle related in the Scripture, are the conformity of the end which it was designed to answer with the perfections of God, and its fitness to carry that end into effect. Such must be a necessary preparation of the intellect for a correct apprehension of the scope of Scripture in its relation of miracles; and, consequently, for a due appreciation of its claims to the belief of mankind. For what are the several portions of its history but, as we have said, a particular continuous record of the agency of the Creator towards our species exhibiting his attributes as a moral Governor; towards one people, indeed, at the beginning under peculiar circumstances, and for specific temporary ends; but thereby carrying forward that plan of human redemption in general which is ascribed to him in the Scriptures?

We would therefore counsel the wavering and unassured believer thus to extend his acquaintance with the Scriptures, as a record of the miraculous dealings of God with mankind. The design itself attributed to the Divine Being is not only so entirely agreeable to our conceptions of his moral perfections, and brought out with so bold an outline on the surface of the Scriptures, as to render it a duty of natural religion to inquire into the proofs of its reality; but it is exemplified in modes so various, in so many particular instances, and with a consistency so

impressive and sustained, that to a mind observant of that design in its recorded progress and development, the Scripture must be continually unfolding new evidences of truth, and rivetting the conviction of its divine authority. To a mind, indeed, like that of Hartley, holding, in its close and powerful grasp, the links which connect morality with religion, and furnished with a knowledge of human nature singularly varied and profound, it is far from difficult to conceive that the Scriptures would, alone and intrinsically, exhibit evidence of a divine original, entirely adequate to satisfy a spirit of impartial inquiry, and to outweigh the objections of scepticism. And sure we are that, in proportion as the Christian gives his thoughts to the precepts and doctrines and narratives of the Scripture, in the relation which they bear to his moral principles, or his accountable nature, and as designed and adapted to illustrate the attributes and government of God, and to bind mankind to his throne of righteousness, will he find his path of research and meditation becoming illumined with the emanations of an intelligence more than human, and marked with the footsteps of the Divinity; and be increasingly prepared to concur and sympathize with the deliberate judgment of that philosopher, of whom we have spoken, not as one standing alone, but as an example and representative of a class of minds

happily more numerous than many imagine—namely, that if there were no other book in the world besides the Bible, there would be a sufficient evidence of the truth of the Gospel.

Before concluding, it is proper we should select some particular instance, whereby to illustrate the importance of such a mental preparation for a due estimate of the miraculous accounts in Scripture, as that upon which we have insisted; and we shall select that passage which records the temptation of Christ by Satan in the wilderness; the conflict between one who is described as the enemy of all goodness and the implacable adversary of mankind, and One who is represented as an example set before us for our imitation, as well as our unfailing Friend and Benefactor. And it should here be remarked, that, in a more extended view of the moral attributes of the Christian religion, the *example* of Christ would claim a distinct and special consideration; for, inasmuch as Christianity professes to be a divine institution for the moral discipline and improvement of mankind, who can fail to be impressed with the manifest consistency, but surpassing greatness, of such a design as that which it attributes to the Deity—that of appointing in our own nature, and for our special imitation, a model of perfect rectitude, of spotless innocence; and moreover, by the apparent marks of the actual realization

of such a design in the person of Jesus Christ? And with reference to Satan, it surely merits observation, that his existence is declared and his nature described, strictly and exclusively, in pursuance of the *moral* purpose which pervades the whole texture of Scripture—that is, in order to excite a more watchful resistance to temptation, and a deeper abhorrence of all evil. The existence of the *idea* of such a being is matter of deep interest and curiosity; and, if it originated in human imagination, not a little wonderful. It is wonderful if man, prone as he is to transgress the divine commandment, and engrossed with present gratification, has entered into so much abstraction and spirituality of thought—has taken so powerful an impression of divine authority, and of the future consequence of resisting it, as to personify the power of temptation; to represent it in a manner so odious and formidable, as the nature and power of Satan are exhibited in the Scriptures;—wonderful if man himself has fallen upon such a method of stimulating his own vigilance and determination in the conflict with his passions!

But returning to the account of the temptation of Christ by Satan, one cannot but perceive the importance of regarding it under a due impression of those truths, which lie at the basis of natural as well as revealed religion; for example, that we are subject to the moral govern-

ment of God, and are not merely the offspring of his creative power, and that the great end of our life is to give proof of our obedience to his will. If unconvinced of such truths, or if we do not bear them in our thoughts, and peruse the pages of Scripture in the light which such truths are fitted to cast upon them, what is there in this narrative which it has given us of the temptation of Christ by the Devil to fix our attention—an attention approaching to reverential?—what to solemnize our feelings?—what in itself to create a belief of its reality, nay, to raise a presumption, or to stir a conjecture, that it was recorded for the eternal well-being of mankind by the pen of divine inspiration, the finger of God? We read of the Evil Spirit appearing to Jesus Christ in a wilderness, in what form we are left to imagine—an omission however which, we may express our belief in passing, would not have been made if the account had been fictitious—we read, we say, of the Evil Spirit appearing to Jesus Christ in a wilderness, and advising him to work a miracle to satisfy his hunger; and afterwards taking him—whether by conveying him through the air, or conducting him in a human manner, is not stated—into the city of Jerusalem, and setting him on a pinnacle of the temple, and challenging him to prove himself to be the Son of God, by throwing himself down from it and receiving no injury

from the fall. Again, we read of him taking Christ, by whatever means, to the summit of an "exceeding high mountain," and promising him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, if he would fall down and worship him—promising him regal possession of all the countries which could in any manner be descried and pointed out from the elevation at which he stood; or, rather, promising him the empire of the whole world, of which he might thus have sought to convey a more lively impression. We have before us little or nothing more than a narrative of facts, not only of a most extraordinary description, but marvellous in the highest degree, running into the fabulous, and wearing all the semblance of fiction. In other words, so far as we are occupied, only or unduly, with the bare literal narrative of the evangelist, we shall be inclined to waver in our faith, and to suspect that, in believing Jesus Christ to be the Son of God, as he declared himself to be, we are resting our faith on a human invention, and "following cunningly-devised fables." That such, however, should be the effect of our reading the Scriptures, more especially such a portion of them as that to which we are referring, in a forgetfulness or virtual abandonment of the primitive truths of religion, is as clearly implied and anticipated in the Scriptures, as it is unquestionably certain in the nature of things. Even in requiring our

belief of the divine authority of its particular precepts, or the reality of facts entirely conformable to human experience, it assumes, as we have seen, the evidence and authority of natural religion; how much more in calling upon us to receive as true an account of events of a strictly preternatural and miraculous character.

If, however, this part of Scripture be considered with the essential principles of religion admitted into the understanding, and impressed upon the heart, we are greatly mistaken if it do not assume an aspect altogether different from that which, in disregarding those principles, we actually compel it to wear—if it do not exhibit so striking a semblance of truth, and so many of its characters, as effectually to counteract the feeling of wonder and incredulity which it may at first have awakened; and accordingly to reverse a prejudgment, which it may have led us to form against the veracity of the Scripture in general, or the competence and fidelity of its authors. Reflecting upon this narration of the evangelist in that appropriate state of mind, a levity of spirit and a flippancy of comment are impossible; and the doubts and hesitations of the believer, as to the reality of the Saviour's encounter with the prince of darkness, will be quickly scattered, and his faith sustained and reassured. For, contemplating the recorded conduct of Jesus Christ as an example of perfect

rectitude towards God, and with a willingness to appreciate it under that character, and to apply it to our own guidance and encouragement under analogous circumstances, were it possible to imagine conduct more answerable to such a description?—to imagine a severer trial of obedience towards God than was put upon Jesus, and of fidelity and resolution in his discharge of that mediatorial office to which he was alleged to have been divinely appointed, and prosecution of the work which he was declared to have undertaken to accomplish for mankind? Could any mode of attack upon his integrity have been adopted, more expressive of the craft and treachery of such a being as Satan is described in the Scriptures, or any manner of repelling him more befitting the character of the predicted Messiah? We allude particularly to the first suggestion of the tempter, "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread."[1] It will be remembered, when this insidious counsel was given to Jesus, he had fasted a great length of time, forty days and forty nights—whether it be meant that he was miraculously supported during that period, or that he had taken no more nourishment than was necessary to his bare subsistence—and had become faint and exhausted from want of nourishment. And what was that counsel of the

[1] Matt. iv. 3.

tempter? How did he urge him to satisfy his hunger? Not by an act of dishonesty so readily excused in the extremity of want; not by conduct which could trench in the smallest degree upon the right or property of any human being; but by the exercise of a miraculous power, by converting the stones of the desert into bread. With that power, however, Christ had been invested, not for his own advantage and welfare, not to raise himself above the wants and sufferings of humanity, but to enable him to exemplify in a more illustrious manner the patience, and resignation, and unshaken confidence in God, with which, as his servants, we are bound to endure them; to set a conspicuous example of that obedience to the will of the Most High, which, as the elder brother of the human family to which he had consented to ally himself, it was preeminently his part to practise. It was surely in a spirit corresponding to the office and destination ascribed to him, of entire self-renunciation and unreserved devotion to the honour of God and the welfare of mankind, that he foiled the artful adversary, and forbore to appease the craving of his own hunger, by the exercise of a power with which he afterwards, as related in the same history, fed the famished multitude in the desert; thus setting a conspicuous and encouraging example to the children of adversity who should afterwards "believe in his name," and

whose integrity is so often tried by the urgency of their wants, to hold fast their profession and, on no account, to swerve from the path of duty. Surely such conduct exhibits a perfect consistency with the representation given of him in the Scriptures, as at once the appointed mediator between God and man, and as setting us "an example that we should walk in his steps." Surely it is a luminous comment upon the language of Scripture:—"For we have not a High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." It is unnecessary, for our purpose, to proceed any farther with the particulars of this narration of the Evangelist. Suffice it to say that if, with a view to appreciate the strength of moral evidence, the amount of internal probability, in this miraculous account in the Scripture, we presume the assumption of our nature by the Son of God to be a *reality*, it was in utter solitude and extreme privation—so far as any being can be alone and destitute who "endures as seeing Him who is invisible"—that the adversary of God and man was permitted to assail the rectitude of his mind; to ply him with instigations to distrust in God, and the indulgence of ambition and cupidity, and to urge him to desert the cause of truth and righteousness. It was in the pangs of hunger, and the horrors of the wilderness, that he dis-

dained the abundance of all nature, and exemplified the declaration made of him in the Scripture, that it was "his meat to do the will of Him that sent him." And we may well ask, whether any example more impressive in its character, better fitted to admonish us of our inalienable duties towards God, and to animate us to discharge them, to fortify our patience and encourage our trust in God—in a word, to accomplish the end for which the Scripture is declared to have been penned, and which our reason concludes it must be the object of a divine revelation to promote, could have been given us,—namely, that of being "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in RIGHTEOUSNESS?"

LECTURE VIII.

THE DEMAND IN THE GOSPEL OF IMPLICIT BELIEF.

1 *Tim.* iii. 16.

AND WITHOUT CONTROVERSY GREAT IS THE MYSTERY OF GODLINESS.

THE argument in support of the reasonableness and credibility of the Christian religion, from the conformity which it exhibits with the conclusions of human reason, or the principles of natural religion, is often very inadequately regarded in its bearing upon that demand which is made of an implicit assent to its peculiar and distinguishing doctrines. Moreover, in collecting and expounding the doctrines of Christianity, the authority of human reason is sometimes appealed to in a manner inconsistent, as we are persuaded, with the dictates of a rational piety in the belief of its divine origin. We propose, then, in our concluding discourse, to consider

that conduct of the understanding, in reference to the special and distinguishing purport of the Scriptures, which is incumbent upon those who believe these writings to be a divine revelation, or the men who penned them to have been inspired by the Spirit of God.

Let it be presumed, then, that an inquirer into the divine origin of Christianity has been brought, by reflecting on the truth and reasonableness of the general principles of religion which it assumes and inculcates, and the manner in which it illustrates and applies them in its particular exposition of our duties,—by reflecting on its peculiar and incomparable tendency, in general, to promote the practice of true piety and virtue, and, we may add, by consulting other sources of evidence concerning it,—let it be presumed, we say, that he has been brought by such means to a persuasion of its divine authority. We conclude, then, that in that persuasion he is bound—he ought to feel that he is infinitely privileged—he is bound, in the first place, to apply his attention, at once and most earnestly, to those facts, those doctrines, asserted in the Scriptures, which human reason could never have discovered, and is incompetent to attest or verify, or which are, specifically and preeminently, matter of divine revelation; and, secondly, that he is bound to place an implicit reliance on the truth of such doctrines.

To proceed with the first particular—In introducing the subject of these discourses, it was remarked, that there was a radical deficiency in that theology—that is, argumentatively and speculatively considered—which aims to found the belief of Christianity on the external evidences of its truth, irrespectively of that appeal which it makes to the independent conclusions of our reason as moral agents, or as we are subject to the dictates of the conscience. Not, indeed, that the study of such evidence should be in the smallest degree postponed, and the mind of youth left vacant of such evidence, instead of being preoccupied with it to the utmost practicable extent; for such is its force and variety, that, in numerous instances, it effectually precludes the inroad of scepticism from whatever quarter, and often disturbs it in its strongest positions; raising a conflict in the judgment which may terminate in its actual overthrow. The position argued was, that, inasmuch as Christianity introduces its message to the world with a commandment to believe its declarations, it manifestly presumes a principle of moral obligation to the Deity; and that, consequently, its foundations, so far as these are subject to question, should be shown to have been laid in the constitution of our rational nature. It has, however, been alleged against those advocates and teachers of Christianity

who have maintained its credibility on the ground of its congruity with the deductions of reason, or the principles of natural religion, that they have betrayed a proneness to limit their exposition of Christianity itself to the inculcation and enforcement of such principles; and have given but little attention, comparatively speaking, to those doctrines which are strictly proper to that religion, and exclusively matter of divine revelation:—we say "comparatively speaking," because we are not, in this branch of our discourse, referring especially to those professors of Christianity who reject particular doctrines alleged to be delivered in the Scriptures, on the presumption that they are contrary to reason: this is a mode of argument in deriving the sense of the Scripture, to which we shall offer some objection in the sequel.

Now we are far from believing that this allegation could be sustained against the more eminent of those advocates of our religion, who have argued its consistency with the principles of reason and natural religion; and it were manifestly unjust to affirm that a neglect of the distinguishing doctrines of the Gospel is characteristic of Christians of our time; it were unjust to make this affirmation of the members of the Church of England. Nevertheless, it is generally and at all times necessary to guard against the proneness in question—a proneness to restrain and narrow

our religious views within such limits as may only correspond with our preconceptions of the general necessity and advantages of a divine revelation, considered as bringing into light, and placing more fully in our view, such truths as are perceived to be agreeable to human reason, and essential, in their practical operation, to the rectitude and welfare of mankind; and, consequently, to estimate Christianity as little, if any thing, more than a declaration of the unity and moral perfections of God, a definite and divinely authorized rule of duty, with the promise of forgiveness to the sincerely penitent, and an announcement of a future state of rewards and punishments;—in brief, to content ourselves with such sentiments of religion—more clearly defined, and more firmly held, it is true—such sentiments of religion, however, as a cultivated and philosophic mind, emancipated from the yoke of superstition, but unacquainted with the tidings of the Gospel, might be competent to acquire, and must be satisfied to embrace. It is at all times necessary, we repeat, to guard against a tendency of this nature, and to press onward to a near and habitual contemplation of that especial economy of salvation which is unfolded to us in the sacred writings; to bring the mind under the immediate influence of those new and powerful inducements, which it has brought us to the fulfilment of all our duties, and to expe-

rience their efficacy to enkindle every devout affection, and to confirm every holy resolution. This, it must be evident on reflection, is the proper use of the understanding, as well as discipline of the heart, in reference to the Scriptures, under the conviction of their divine origin.

The case, indeed, is readily supposable, that it might have been the sole design of Christianity to recover mankind to that knowledge of their relations to the Creator which they had been originally capacitated to attain, and which, in the due exercise of their faculties, would never have been lost; to repair the effects of their forgetfulness and insensibility; and, by express denunciations and promises, to reclaim them to the obedience of his laws. And, on this supposition, there would have been ample ground to acknowledge the necessity and worth of the Christian religion. But there is no colour whatever for so limited a conception of its actual purport. The manner in which Christianity was introduced into the world by its original teachers, sufficiently betokened that they were about to make some particular demand on the faith of mankind, and to publish doctrines which it would be incumbent to receive, in deference to their special authority as the messengers of God. Its Founder, it is true, declared that the man who was desirous of obeying the will of the Creator, was thereby qualified to perceive that

the doctrine which he delivered was from God; yet we can hardly suppose that the meaning of his assertion was, that every such person would be led to that conclusion by a consideration of his doctrine alone; for, if so, why should he have professed to work miracles in attestation of his divine commission, and have alleged their reality and magnitude as proofs of a dereliction of piety in those who rejected him? The import of that remarkable declaration was evidently this—that there was such a conformity between the doctrine which he taught, in reference to our duties to the Creator and our condition as subjects to his government, as, in connexion with the tokens of a preternatural agency in the person who delivered it, to constitute an adequate evidence that he was personally delegated by God to instruct mankind, and, consequently, entitled to belief in the whole extent of his communications. Moreover, the individuals who, after the crucifixion of their Leader, represented themselves as divinely commissioned to teach more fully, and to carry into all nations the religion which he had taught them, appealed, in a similar manner, to the miracles which they professed to perform. With regard, indeed, to the attributes and laws of the Creator as the Moral Governor of the world, they positively asserted that these, as they declared them, might have been discovered in the right use of the human

understanding; clearly implying, that when proposed to our reception, they would still more readily *admit of proof and confirmation.* But that they made declarations, or asserted doctrines, the belief of which they demanded, peremptorily and absolutely, in virtue of the miracles which they performed, is abundantly implied in the following most important passage:—"How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?"[1]

But farther, there are, upon the face of the Scriptures, several facts stated, several doctrines asserted and implied, which, manifestly, human reason could never have anticipated, and is unable to deal with in the way of proof or confirmation; and which offer themselves to our belief exclusively on the authority of a divine revelation. Not only so; there are express declarations, on the part of the sacred writers, to the effect that they were divinely commissioned and qualified to teach such doctrines; nay, that, in the publication of the Gospel to mankind, they were disclosing some fact of a most extraordinary and wonderful nature, as well as of

[1] Heb. ii. 3, 4.

inestimable value to mankind; one calculated to fill them with astonishment, as well as with gratitude. "And, without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness;"—great is the secret revealed, the fact made known, in the recovery of mankind to true religion—"God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." It were apart from our purpose, on this occasion, to maintain, on the authority of the Scriptures, the truth of this declaration in that sense in which it is received by most Christians; that is, to maintain the actual assumption of human nature by the Divinity, in the accomplishment of our redemption by the Son of God. We cite the passage, inasmuch as it cannot but remind us that the fact of which the sacred writers principally treat, and which they were inspired by the Spirit of God to make known, the special object of our faith as Christians, is one which it is not in the province of human reason to judge of; and which it is our duty to receive in implicit reliance upon the testimony of the Scriptures, as strictly matter of divine revelation. No reference, indeed, may be made in this passage to the strictly inscrutable nature of the fact which is declared, or its incomprehensibleness to our faculties; for, besides that the Scriptural import of the term "mystery," as is well

known, is simply something secret, unrevealed—(for example, that the Gentiles should be introduced into the church of God, and form a part of the true spiritual Israel, was a mystery till it was revealed by the Divine Spirit to the Apostles, involving, however, in no degree an inexplicable proposition)—besides this, the inspired teachers of our religion were not accustomed, as is manifest, to contemplate the truths which they delivered in relation to human powers of comprehension. They professed to believe them in virtue of a divine illumination conveyed and made evident to their minds, and demanded the belief of others as messengers from God, accredited to be such by especial demonstrations of his power. It follows that the evidence, in our possession, of the reality of the miracles recorded in the New Testament is not only matter for research and examination, in judging of the credibility of our religion in general, but is proposed, especially, as the ground of our faith in such of its doctrines as are incapable of proof from human reason, or, in their nature, above the comprehension of our faculties.

The object which filled the first teachers of our religion with amazement, in the accomplishment of our redemption by Jesus Christ, was, doubtless, some transcendent act of divine condescension, supremely calculated to inspire the human race with gratitude and devotion towards

him; but what we are remarking is, that we find in their writings palpable and repeated expressions of their own conviction, that the truths which they were especially delegated to unfold were remote from all human intelligence, and the fruit of divine inspiration;—their own conviction that prophecy had not been uttered in former ages, or its words fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ, or men endowed like themselves with miraculous powers, to establish the belief of truths which might have been elicited by man's understanding, or even truths which, though before unknown, would, when revealed, be only kindred or level to the preconceptions of mankind; but to spread abroad the knowledge of some fact—some measure on the part of the Deity, that would surpass all human conception, astonish and confound inquiring and meditating minds. What else can be the import of such words as the following?—"For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?"[1]

It follows, that when the advocates of Chris-

[1] 1 Cor. i. 18—20.

tianity allege a conformity in any of its principles with the dictates of reason, or the presumptions of natural religion, so far from showing any rational ground, or rather any plausible pretext, for resting in the latter, they are raising arguments for a special attention to the distinguishing doctrines of Christianity, and a cordial acquiescence in their truth and authority. For what is the object proposed by such reasoning? With what view do we, as Christians, assert the original obligations to piety and virtue—assert the authority of conscience, or the probability of a future state? Not, it is presumed, to exhibit the sufficiency of natural religion, but to infer the credibility of the Scriptures? And why, but for the same purpose, do we argue the use and necessity of a divine revelation to inform, regulate, and satisfy the mind of man; seeing it has ever been his nature to presume the existence of superior and invisible power, whether inherent in one being or in more; to seek to propitiate that power by worship and obedience; to own his accountableness to an authority higher than human; and to entertain hopes and fears of a condition beyond the grave? And why, more particularly, do we insist on the inestimable worth of a religion, which, like the Christian, enlists the religious principles in the promotion of every virtue, and associates the idea of God so intimately and absolutely with the love of all

rectitude, and the abhorrence of all evil? Why, as Christians, do we judge such topics to be valuable and important, but to corroborate the claims of the Scripture to be received as a divine revelation? But the great discovery which is made to us in the Scripture, is that especial manifestation of the Divinity, which was foreshown in prophecy, presignified in sacrifice, and which is conspicuously set forth by Evangelists and Apostles, as the proper basis of our confidence towards him, and a commanding inducement to the obedience of his will. The topics adverted to are, consequently, so many forcible arguments to prove the reality and importance of that particular display of the holiness and mercy of God; and to convince us of the duty, and the wisdom, of giving our close and earnest consideration to the scheme of human redemption by the mediation and sacrifice of the Son of God. They are so many veins of religious truth, conducting us to the heart and wealth of the mine; conducting us to the peculiar treasures of revealed truth—"the unsearchable riches of Christ."

Such considerations must convey a rebuke and warning to every professor of the Gospel, who holds in comparative indifference its essentially proper and distinguishing truths, or is satisfied to award them but a secondary and inferior share of his attention. But, in collecting the

import of the Scripture, and maintaining some particular scheme or modification of Christian doctrine, there is often a manner of appealing to the authority of human reason, which renders it necessary to assert, and to assert repeatedly, that it is the part of a *rational* piety, as well as a most incumbent duty, in the belief that the Gospel is a divine revelation, to place an implicit reliance on the truth of its statements and representations. In maintaining the reasonableness of this particular duty, we shall at once observe, that there appears an exceeding impropriety, to use a far too lenient term, in that facility with which individuals, as Christians, admit the suggestion, or presume the possibility, that the Scriptures may affirm propositions contradictory to reason. The fact, unhappily, cannot surprise us, for the human mind is continually admitting ideas, entertaining presumptions, dishonourable to the perfections of God, and unfavourable to his dominion over us. We are chargeable, however, with an exceeding impropriety, if, while we acknowledge the Scripture to be an authenticated communication from God, we harbour the supposition of a contrariety to reason in any of its statements and representations. It would shock our rational faculties to conceive that God would declare by his messengers that which was untrue, and, in the nature of things, incongruous; and we should almost resent, as an affront to our

understanding, the intimation of a caution to beware lest we allowed such a conception to present itself in the shape of a reality. But what signifies the recoil of the whole mind from such an idea, if our conviction of the veracity and faithfulness of God exert no appropriate influence on the tone of our meditations, and the method of our reasoning, concerning him? What are our abstract conclusions relating to the Deity, be they ever so just and befitting, if they take no substantial shape, in the exercise of a powerful control on the habitual movements of the understanding; if they fail of a practical efficacy, so to speak, on the conduct of our thoughts, in the business of religious inquiry? If it were irrational, above expression, to suppose that God would inspire individuals to propound untruths and contradictions, and to call upon us to believe them, and we have concluded the Scriptures to be a revelation from himself, why should we expect untruths and contradictions in *them?* Why do we prepare to encounter such contradictions? Why do we allow the notion that they can have found an admission into the word of God? We hold in our hands writings purporting to bring us intelligence relative to our condition and destiny as accountable beings; and we have been conducted by the light of reason to the conclusion, that the bearers of this intelligence were messengers sent from God

to mankind. On the same grounds, then, and with the same confidence, that our reason is competent to conclude that Christ and his Apostles were messengers from God, our reason is competent to conclude that whatever we shall find that they have delivered, is true; and that it will be our duty to receive it in a perfect reliance on the veracity of God. If we have determined the Scriptures to be the work of divine inspiration, we have virtually determined that they declare no propositions contradictory to reason: we have anticipated and disposed of that suggestion altogether. In allowing a possibility of error and incongruity in the doctrine which they inculcate, we are, in effect, wavering in our belief that they are the writings of inspired men; we are re-opening the question of their credibility; we are retracting the testimony of our own reason to the divinity of their origin. And as to our imagination, and the movement of our feelings under its influence, so far as these can be accessary to a due sense of our obligations to Almighty God for the gift of the Holy Scriptures, and to a reverential attention in perusing them, we seem to be bereft of such functions of the mind altogether. Imagination, or any vivid conception, in reading the Scriptures—we can have none. The men, whose writings we can thus bear to associate with things repugnant to reason, were endowed with supernatural powers;

invested with authority to suspend the laws of nature; empowered to dispense with them; raised far above humanity; that they might lay deeply and broadly the foundations of the Church of Christ in the midst of idolatry and wickedness, and withstand the fiercest hostility of the world. We have the very words of these very men;—is not that our belief?—yet, in this era of the mind's activity, so slow and feeble are our conceptions of the grandeur of their mission and endowments, that it would seem to be necessary that these illustrious and awful ministers of the Almighty should quit, for a time, their seat of triumph and repose, to which they passed through their fiery path of trial, and resume their powers, and repeat their work upon the earth; should heal diseases and raise the dead again, lay bare the secrets of the human heart, and inflict the judgments of God upon the sinner; should appeal to our senses, astonish us by their deeds, and appal us by their presence; in order that we may yield some befitting reverence to the Deity, in our reception of the words of his messengers.

But this, it may be said, is all inapplicable to our actual experience. Insist, as you will, on an antecedent conclusion that there can be no propositions repugnant to reason in the Scriptures; yet, in point of fact, if you receive them in the sense which they at first, and most

readily, suggest to the reader, or the sense which the bulk of readers, from whatever causes, have annexed to the language of the sacred writers, you will be met by such propositions; you will be compelled to perceive them and, on the evidence of your own reason, to abandon them. Well, then, if I shall be compelled to perceive them—may every believer of Christianity say—if I shall be compelled to perceive them, let me perceive them because compelled to perceive them. If such be my condition in the endeavour "to have a conscience void of offence towards God" as well as man, that, after having ascertained, so far as my reason has enabled me, that, in the publication of the Scriptures, God has vouchsafed mankind a special communication from himself, recorded what he has done in their behalf, made known the conditions of acceptance with himself, and described the way of peace and life eternal,—I am destined to be disturbed in this persuasion, to be disappointed in the assurance which now possesses me, that I am acquiring knowledge in matters of supreme importance, upon which the world has lain in utter ignorance, or been tasked to endless speculation and mere conjecture;—if after having gained access, as I believe, to the temple of truth, passed its gates and entered within its walls, yet, when about to lift the vail of its inner sanctuary, a mist of confusion and perplexity

shall fall upon me, and I shall falter in my purpose, not knowing whether to proceed or retrace my steps;—if I shall be compelled to choose between the evidence which brought me to the persuasion that the Scriptures were the word of God, and that evidence which convinces me that it affirms impossibilities and contradictions, I must submit to such a trial of my sincerity towards God. I must bear the burden which, on that supposition, he will have deemed fit to place upon my faculties. I shall not be comfortless: "God knoweth our frame." I shall be solaced with the reflection that he alone has placed it upon me, and he will enable me to bear it: that I approached the volume, which I judged to reveal his will and dispensations, with all humility, and thankfulness, and teachableness of mind.—But the question under consideration is not whether any or what conflicts of mind may lie before us, in our investigation of the Scriptures. We may be as unable to determine whether a particular trial of our religious principles awaits us in the conduct of the understanding, as to anticipate the trials which we shall be called to endure in the ordinary regulation of our lives. In the former instance, and in the latter, our immediate concern should be to provide ourselves with such principles of thought and action, as are essential to establish, and can alone ensure, consistency and

comfort in the faith and practice of a Christian. What, then, is our reasonable duty in the belief that the Scriptures are a divine revelation? What but to banish, as utterly inconsistent with that belief, as abhorrent to the devotional affections proper to such a belief, the imagination that they assert impossibilities or contradictions? What, but to place undoubting confidence in the truth and perfect reasonableness of the Scriptures?

It may still be judged by some that this strain of observation is inapplicable to that method of dealing with the import of the Scripture, which we consider thus open to objection and remonstrance. It may be said that when doctrines, alleged to be declared in the Scriptures, are affirmed to be contradictory to reason, it is meant that, inasmuch as a revelation from God cannot declare things unreasonable and contradictory, such doctrines cannot be declared in the Scriptures; and that, consequently, those passages which are commonly alleged to convey them, must demand a construction different from that which is usually placed upon them. Be it so said: we retract not a particle of our opinion of the peculiar impropriety, to use no stronger term, of that facility with which those who believe the Scripture to be a divine revelation admit the possibility—allow the idea, of an unreasonableness in its doctrines. For if we cite and urge

the independent authority of human reason, in the investigation and exposition of the sense of Scripture, we virtually admit that possibility, we allow that idea. We introduce surmises and notions into a province of inquiry, into an exercise of our faculties, from which such notions ought to be especially excluded. We would ask an individual who should reply to the animadversion we have offered, in the manner supposed, this question—If you are convinced that a divine revelation cannot assert a particular doctrine, why did you not ascertain whether the Scripture actually asserted that proposition or not, before you admitted it to be a divine revelation? Was it reasonable, under such a conviction, to conclude that the Scriptures were worthy of a title so august, an authority so absolute, before you had certainly learned that they did not contain that proposition? Was it necessary or advantageous to a correct appreciation of that question, as an exception to questions in general, to determine it beforehand, and even so peremptorily to prejudge it? Was it proper or desirable to set out with a predetermination, that the Scriptures did not convey such a proposition, in order to form the most accurate and impartial judgment as to whether they did or did not convey it? The truth is that you concluded the Scriptures to be a divine revelation on the strength of premises which, in

relation to your understanding, were essentially inadequate. You did not perceive that, in your judgment, there was a particular condition necessary to accredit the Scriptures as a divine revelation—the condition that it should not declare a certain doctrine, touching, we may presume, the person or office of Jesus Christ. Ought you not to have satisfied yourself that that condition was fulfilled before you concluded that the Scriptures were from God? You would not have assented to its divine authority, had it not accorded with your conception of the moral attributes of the Creator; had it not enjoined a pure morality; and if it be competent to human reason to insist on the negation or absence of a particular doctrine, relating to the person and work of Christ, in a divine revelation, why did you not satisfy yourself on this point also, as essential to a rational belief of the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, before you admitted these to be the word of God? The question as to what is the actual meaning of certain writings —the question whether the men who penned them did or did not intend to convey a particular doctrine, may surely be discussed and settled without implicating us in a controversy, than which there cannot be one more absolutely superfluous, or more repugnant to a rational spirit of religion — namely, whether writings proved and acknowledged to be of divine in-

spiration, can demand our belief of false and incongruous positions.

You may, it is probable, reply that you are conscientiously convinced, in the first place, that the particular doctrine, or doctrines, in question are in themselves contradictory to reason, and therefore cannot be delivered in a divine revelation; and, secondly, that this conclusion of your reason is realized in the Scriptures, inasmuch as those doctrines are not to be found in them. You may accordingly hold it to be perfectly reasonable to contend for both these positions. We submit, on the contrary, that in disputing with any who receive the Scriptures as a divine revelation, you should limit yourself to the *latter* position; namely, that the doctrine which you repudiate is not delivered in the Scriptures. In maintaining the former position, in giving your attention to the question as to what can or cannot be declared in a divine revelation, you not only lay yourself open to an imputation of indecision and vacillation in your own judgment, that the Scriptures are a divine revelation; but you assert a position which must, of necessity, be entirely lost upon your opponents. In believing the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, they are as firmly convinced as yourself that they cannot convey incongruities and contradictions. By arguing, therefore, that a doctrine, which they are persuaded is delivered in the Scriptures,

involves a contradiction, you may indeed unsettle and destroy their belief of the divine inspiration of those writings; but if your purpose be to convince them that they have misunderstood the import of the Scriptures, your argument must be wholly irrelevant and useless. We conclude, then, that in disputes among those who are agreed upon the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, to make assertions, and to moot questions, as to what doctrines are repugnant to reason, and cannot therefore be delivered in them, is at once inconsistent with the reverence due to an acknowledged revelation from God, and impertinent to the point at issue.

The qualifications requisite for a right construction of the sense of Scripture, or a correct apprehension of its doctrines, form a subject distinct from the purpose of the present discourse; and doubtless, in this department of inquiry, there is abundant scope for a cultivated judgment, as well as for the application of various knowledge. But we may observe, that they who favour an opinion that to learn the essential import, or the capital doctrines, of the Scripture, is a difficult attainment, and the privilege only of a few, appear to be rather occupied with their own particular view of the doctrine which it teaches, than impressed with the pretensions of the Scripture itself, as a divine revelation. For the Scripture addresses itself to the understand-

ing of mankind in general; and, to inspire an implicit confidence in its declarations, not only refers us to the miracles which were wrought to attest the divine inspiration of its authors—that is, to the evidence adducible of the reality of those miracles—but appeals to the illustration of the attributes of God in the aspect of the creation, and the frame of our own minds. That a particular construction of the sense of Scripture, in reference to its prominent and characteristic doctrines, should be different from that of its readers in general, so far from raising a prepossession in its favour, would rather warrant a presumption of its fallacy, or a closer examination of its merits. But the point we are now maintaining is, that, when men have ascertained such a conformity, in a portion of the doctrines of Christianity, as well as its practical precepts in general, to the deductions of reason, as to take their stand as avowed believers and advocates of that system of religion, they have become rationally subject to the absolute guidance and authority of divine revelation, in matters of faith. In other words, the course which reason points out to them is, simply, to institute a full and impartial inquiry into the *language* of Scripture; and by comparing one part with others, and applying their attention to the whole, with whatever help any branch of learning may afford them, to elicit its actual import, the sense intended to be conveyed by its

authors. If a conformity between a portion of the Gospel and the conclusions of reason, be of any force to establish the credibility of the Gospel itself as a divine communication, it is so to establish the credibility of its declarations in general, and to enforce an implicit assent to the whole substance of its doctrines. And those theologians who, on the contrary, prejudge its purport, and expound its doctrines under the influence of such a prejudgment, are surely imposing a deception on their own understanding, in presuming that they adduce the principles of natural religion to corroborate the claims of the Gospel to be received as a divine revelation—that is, to dispose us to believe the facts which it especially professes to declare. When, for example, they affirm the divinity and incarnation of the Son of God to be repugnant to reason—is this a means of disposing us to believe the declarations of the Gospel, in reference to his person and office in the accomplishment of man's redemption?—a means, moreover, of preparing us for the disclosure of a mystery—a great and wonderful secret concerning him? What, to prepossess us with a persuasion that, if the Gospel declared him to be superhuman and divine, and in reality to have assumed our nature when he appeared as a man, it would declare that which is itself incredible, impossible,—which it is an abuse of reason to believe! Can such expositors of the

Bible be held to enforce its claims as a revelation from God, when they argue the conformity of many of its doctrines with the independent presumptions of reason? If such a conformity signify anything, as an argument for accepting the Gospel as a divine communication, it is a ground for accepting its decisions on subjects of which we have otherwise no knowledge; just as the correspondence of a man's words with his actions, so far as these have come within our observation, is a reason for confiding in his professions, under circumstances in which we have no means of ascertaining his integrity. If, under such circumstances, we harbour and abet a notion that, presuming he had acted, or was about to act, in a certain manner, he would betray a dishonesty of purpose, we should deceive ourselves in the supposition that we placed an implicit reliance on his integrity. In truth, there is some difficulty in accounting such expositors of the Bible advocates of Christianity as a divine revelation—advocates, strictly speaking, of revealed religion; and we may well be at a loss to understand in what manner they can be regarded as commending to our belief, any such wonderful fact as that which the sacred writers profess to make known. Their reasoning in support of Christianity may, it is true, be greatly useful to the general interests of religion and morality. When they show that the doctrines taught by Jesus Christ and his

Apostles harmonize with the deductions of reason, they do important service to individuals and society. But in what degree do they rest our belief on the authority of the divine revelation? What scope do they leave for the pure exercise of faith in the word of God, an act of piety unquestionably inculcated in the Scriptures?

Those conclusions of reason, those principles of natural religion, which actually corroborate the claims of the Bible as a divine revelation, must themselves possess an inherent claim to our practical acquiescence and submission. They may have been suggested to our own thoughts, they may have been brought more clearly and powerfully into view, by Christianity, but they cannot derive their own evidence and authority from a religion which they are strictly available to support. They must in themselves be true and obligatory upon us; otherwise it must be idle to allege them in confirmation of Christianity. Hence, indeed, some have asserted the truth and authority of such principles with a view, not to establish, but to disprove, the necessity and benefits of the Christian religion; for example, Lord Herbert, of Cherbury, who contended that mankind were capable of a piety, acceptable and pleasing to God, without a divine revelation; and that the Scriptures had not disclosed any necessary principles which our own reason could not have discovered. Those

expositors of the Bible therefore, to whom we refer, are entitled to our acknowledgment for the service which they render to religion, inasmuch as they uphold and inculcate truths which human reason is competent to establish; but how can we esteem them as advocates of divine revelation, if they conduct us no farther in the search of religious knowledge; but when they have brought us to prophets and apostles, teachers sent from Heaven to enlighten us, they refer us back again for the import of their language, the substance of their doctrines, to the conclusions, negative or positive, of uninspired minds?

In maintaining the reasonableness and duty of placing an implicit reliance on the testimony of the Scripture, in the belief of its divine inspiration, we are fully aware that the reflecting reader of the Scripture will meet with doctrines which are difficult to be comprehended, and which may even show an appearance of incongruity. But if, in the exercise of such a confidence in the declarations of Scripture as is due to an acknowledged revelation from God, our attention be called to such doctrines, what will be the result? A presumption, most assuredly, that the difficulty of comprehending them arises from the limitation of our faculties, and that the appearance of incongruity is nothing more than an appearance. In that presumption we shall either rest at once and finally, or we shall pro-

ceed to an actual examination, in the certainty that we shall verify that presumption. With such an expectation, we shall not readily consent to the superficial aspect of things; we shall hardly be satisfied with no severer exertion of our faculties, than is necessary to perceive a self-evident contradiction. We shall search, as closely as we are able, the reasoning alleged to demonstrate contradictions in the doctrines of Scripture, and, if possible, sift the whole material of which it is composed. It will be found, we believe, and has been found, that such an imputation on the Scripture is deduced from premises assumed without proof, and sustained by analogies which fail of application; that the doctrines impugned relate to questions of a nature—and this it is at least competent to our reason to conclude —which surpass the comprehension of human faculties; and are, as the Scripture assumes them to be, strictly matter of divine revelation; that is, entitled to our belief in implicit reliance on the testimony of Him who has declared them.

We revert, then, to the conclusion which was maintained in the former part of this discourse—one which claims the attention of Christians generally, and is especially pressed upon our consideration as members of a Church, which exhibits so prominently the peculiar and characteristic doctrines of the Gospel—the conclusion that, whereas we may be inclined to limit

our conceptions of Christianity to those principles only, in which it is perceived to be conformable to human reason, the proper use to be made of such conformity—as indeed of every kind and degree of evidence whereby the Scriptures are proved to be of divine authority—is to apply it as an argument for a firm and steadfast belief of that truth, which it is especially the object of the Gospel to make known—the burden of its message to mankind. And may it be ours thus to experience its full efficacy to inspire our devotion towards God, and establish our hope and confidence towards him! If it be agreeable to our reason to presume his placability towards the penitent, may such a presumption dispose us to appreciate that attribute of his character in the express appointment of a Mediator, by whom at once to effect the vindication of his righteous laws, and to bestow upon us the forgiveness of all our sins; and thereby operate as a motive to faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, whose blood cleanseth from all sin! If it seem agreeable to our reason to entertain the highest conception of the goodness of God, may this dispose us to believe and contemplate the manifestation of his love to mankind set forth in the Gospel—the theme of inspiration:—"God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life!" May it

dispose us to contemplate the wondrous condescension of our Redeemer, who clothed himself with our inferior nature, endured a life of suffering, and even the extremity of the cross, to obtain our acceptance with the divine holiness; to dispel the dread of a future retribution; and more than satisfy the natural universal desire of a better life;—"who hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light!" And may the sense of our obligation to so unspeakable goodness subdue all reluctance to obey the divine commandment, and determine us to "present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is our reasonable service!"

THE END.

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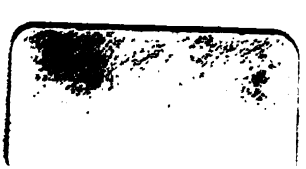
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